

HEALING AND DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS  
THROUGH SHARED VALUES BASED ON  
SYSTEMATIC AGAPISM

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## ABSTRACT

### HEALING AND DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH SHARED VALUES BASED ON SYSTEMATIC AGAPISM

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The hypothesis is, many are struggling or fail due to a lack of shared values. If shared values are to be implemented and maintained, they must be rooted in a special kind of love. The context for this project is the Martindale-Brightwood Community of Indianapolis, Indiana. This project utilized a case study approach, by surveying members of the community in order to identify reasons why relationships fail to be established or maintained, and what values encourage strong relationship. A sociotheological concept of *Systematic Agapism* is presented as the best foundation for shared values, in order to heal and develop relationships.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The African concept of *ubuntu* comes to mind. It is interpreted as “I am who I am, because of who we are, and because of who we are, I am.” I thank God for those who God blessed me with to share this journey.

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I thank all who participated in making this project so meaningful.

I love you all!

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

African Proverb

## **INTRODUCTION**

One Sunday morning, I looked across the congregation of Scott United Methodist Church and noticed the high number of broken relationships there. These breaks exist between couples, family members, church members, and from generation to generation. Then I considered the broken relationships in my own life and family, and I began to wonder why? The problem addressed herein is that the lack of shared values is a major factor in the failure of relationships in the Black community. The context for this project is the Martindale-Brightwood Community of Indianapolis, Indiana, where Scott United Methodist Church serves as the project focal point. A system of agapism (or systematic agapism) is being presented as the foundation for shared values, in order to heal and develop relationships within the Black community.

In Chapter One, my Ministry Focus is shared. This chapter chronicles my call to ministry, and the history of Scott United Methodist Church, in order to set the contextual foundation for this doctoral project. It shows how the context serves as a microcosm of the Black community in America.

In Chapter Two, the Biblical Foundation is established. The primary text is 1 Corinthians 13:4-13, where Paul completes his responses to the many conflicts found in the church at Corinth by declaring the deep need for love as the greatest element in all

ministerial gifts and efforts. In the text, the many aspects of love are shared as the key qualities for validating their gifts and ministries.

In Chapter Three, the Historical Foundation is established. The primary event is the Synod of Carthage, held in 397 C.E. It was through the many synods and church councils that the Early Church came to agreement on issues. But, it was at the Synod of Carthage that church leaders first agreed on which writings would go into the biblical canon, which we find in our Bibles today. These synods and councils show how they were able to agree on shared values despite their various theological, geographic, or nationalistic points of view.

In Chapter Four, the Theological Foundation is established. The primary theme dealt with in this chapter is agape love. This includes explorations of the meaning of agape shared by Paul (in 1 Corinthians 13), Augustine of Hippo, Paul Tillich and Martin Luther King, Jr. Through their writings, the deeper practical meanings of love are revealed. Through them, love comes to life and seeks to walk amongst us, and to live in us. This chapter explains the strengths and weaknesses of love, and why its weaknesses require a systematic agapism in order to make agape meaningful for black people.

In Chapter Five, the Interdisciplinary Foundation is established. The primary emphasis in this chapter is the sociotheological significance of systematic agapism, and what ministerial and scientific practices are bests for sharing values based on systematic agapism. The challenges and benefits for establishing shared values based on systematic agapism are explored, and why the Black Church is the best way to establish this system of shared values is also explained.

In Chapter Six, the project analysis is set forth. This involves reporting on a sermons series on right relationships, a survey on what makes relationships work, a one-day conference with survey participants and others on love and values, and three community forums on love and values, where we developed a System of Shared Values.

The human experience is full of relationships. Where the relationships are healthy, there is the best potential for progress. Where the relationships are unhealthy, there is the potential for confusion and failure. The lack of a properly established foundation, and shared values for relationships, are contributors to the marital, generational, political, religious and racial problems we are facing today.<sup>1</sup> The enslavement of black people disrupted ancient foundations and disturbed their shared values. According to E. Franklin Frazier, the way we were captured and mistreated “tended to loosen all social bonds” among us, and “to destroy the traditional bases of social cohesion.”<sup>2</sup>

When specifically considering the Martindale-Brightwood Community of Indianapolis, Indiana, most homes in the community are headed by a single parent. There are tense relationships between the youth and the elders. Due to low voter participation, there is a disconnect between the politician and constituent, and most citizens don’t know who their elected officials are. Though black people represent the highest racial demographic of church goers in America, most residents in the Martindale-Brightwood

<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Fremont, “Building a Healthy Relationship From the Start,” The University of Texas at Austin Counseling and Mental Health Center, accessed May 6, 2019, [https://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav\\_healthyrelationships.html](https://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav_healthyrelationships.html). Also, Steven Barboza, Editor. *The African American Book of Values* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 10.

<sup>2</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1963), 11.

community are not members of a church.<sup>3</sup> Most residents of Martindale-Brightwood are black, yet there are other races in the community. Many whites who live in the community are new residents, and generally represent the gentrification of the neighborhood.<sup>4</sup>

In general, Martindale-Brightwood is a microcosm of the Black community in America. By saying “Black community,” what is meant here is people of African descent, and those who love them, who are bound together by a common, history, oppression and aspirations, whose truncated potential is yet to be fully realized.<sup>5</sup> This may also include places where they have sustained a predominant population of black residents of two or more generations. Martindale-Brightwood was founded as a settlement community in the late 1800s, and has maintained a Black majority since its founding. However, there are some Black communities that became so due to integration of black people and the mass exodus of whites known as “white flight.” This is true for the Haughville community in Indianapolis. In either case, racist acts have continued to be a reality in Black communities to one degree or another.

What’s more concerning is the decline, or loss, of Black unity represented by the lack of shared values. Prior to integration, certain values were generally shared in the Black community. It was understood that children were to respect their elders, that the

<sup>3</sup> Religious Landscape Study, “Attendance at Religious Services by Race/Ethnicity,” Pew Research Center, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/compare/attendance-at-religious-services/by/racial-and-ethnic-composition/>

<sup>4</sup> Chris O’Malley, “New Outlook for a Decrepit City Neighborhood,” Indianapolis Business Journal, accessed May 6, 2019, <https://www.ibj.com/articles/22155-new-outlook-for-a-decrepit-city-neighborhood>

<sup>5</sup> This definition was collectively developed at the Forum on Love and Values on November 10, 2019 at Scott United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana.

church was to be regarded as holy, that the marriage relationship was not to be interfered with, that the whole community was responsible for the protection and discipline of the children, that the men showed respect to the women, that the adults shared their knowledge and skills with the youth, that boys were expected to grow into responsible men, that girls were expected to grow into respectable women, that the community would ostracize those who committed wrong, and that the success or failure of one person in the community reflected on all in the community.<sup>6</sup>

This project represents, what can be, the instituting of shared values that can play a major role in establishing or healing relationships. If Black churches agree to serve as love centers that promote and train people on living this specific set of shared values, those communities have the potential to establish, or re-establish, themselves as social organisms where systematic agapism will be realized in practical ways. This means that couples in intimate relationships will have agreement on their values, and agreement with the community around them at the same time. If the couple that lives these values are members of a church that shares these values, they are less alone in their relationship. If their neighbors, friends and family members share these values, they have a broader support base for their journey toward oneness. If the values have intergenerational appeal, they can serve as a bridge between the generation gap. If the values have ecumenical balance, they can serve as a point of unity and cooperation from one religious body to another. If the values have personal, yet practical, meaning, they can provide the foundation two people need in seeking to resolve conflicts. If the values are honored, they can be a conduit for receiving and conveying the power of love.

<sup>6</sup> Cassie Damewood, “African American Family Values,” Love to Know – Lifestyle, accessed May 6, 2019, <https://family.lovetoknow.com/african-american-family-values>.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose here is to describe the ways my ministry interests and skills relate to the needs of the context I serve in; how my ministry interests and skills, and the needs of my context serve to form the basis of my Doctor of Ministry project; and I will offer a theme statement and hypothesis on which I am building my Doctor of Ministry project.

#### **Abstract**

We are living in the most amazing time in world history. It's amazing because the present world population of 7.5 billion people, is more than the 7 billion that populated the Earth in nearly 2000 years before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It's amazing because scientists are growing human organs from stem cells, genetically altering plant and animal life with profound accuracy, creating artificial intelligence that can out-think (i.e., calculate) humans, and exploring Earth-like planets as far as 500 light years away. It's amazing because we have communication technology that enables us to talk with people in every part of the world via text, video and audio in real time.

But, despite our great numbers, amazing scientific achievements, and our communication breakthroughs, humanity is conflicted and disconnected. This is especially true in America in general, and particularly so in the Black community. Our marriages have failed. Our institutions are struggling to survive. Our wealth and abilities are benefitting others, more than benefitting us. We have lost generational continuity. All the while, it seems that the Black Church has lost or abandoned its place as the heart of the Black community.

My Doctor of Ministry project seeks to establish concepts and practices that can be used in the Black community to reduce conflicts and build connections. These practices have been developed to best facilitate healthy relationships in the Black community. Special emphasis has been placed on exploring the development, maintenance and success of committed relationships as a foundation for healthy families, churches and communities.

## Context

In the fall of 2008 Scott United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary. I had become the Senior Pastor at Scott in the summer of that year. The pastor who preceded me, Rev. Raymond Wilkins, served there for seven years. The former pastor's leaving, and my arrival, brought mixed feelings among the members of the church. However, they worked hard to make my family and me feel welcomed.

The Martindale – Brightwood community, where Scott UMC is located, was a settlement town that was annexed by Indianapolis, Indiana in 1897, and is one of its oldest Black communities.

The area that surrounds the church has maintained a residential and industrial presence for more than 135 years. This community's origin is unique from Indianapolis as a whole because of the large numbers of Blacks who settled there, its history as a hub for the train industry, and its development of a thriving Black business district. However, it did exhibit the same patterns of racial segregation prevalent throughout the city.<sup>1</sup>

Indianapolis geographically sits in the center of the state of Indiana, and is its state capital and largest city. It is far enough south to have a climate less harsh during winter than Chicago, Illinois, and far enough north to fully experience the four seasons unlike Nashville, Tennessee to its south.

I came to Indianapolis, from Atlanta, Georgia, with my wife and two children after graduating from seminary in 2000. I didn't know what to expect, and yet was confident that God was guiding me. Throughout my last nineteen years serving in ministry in Indiana, I have become more experienced, focused, determined, and confident in trusting God to guide me along the path of life God has for me.

I came to Indiana with a strong commitment to relevant preaching, community development and cultural awareness. My commitments to these three foci have gotten stronger through the years. All that I do in ministry involves these three areas. Therefore, how I do ministry contextually is guided by these commitments.

<sup>1</sup> Martindale Brightwood Alliance for Educational Success, "What is the Martindale Brightwood Community," IUPUI Division of Continuing Studies, accessed January 3, 2019, <http://mbaes.iupui.edu/community.html>.

Over the last twenty-five years, Scott United Methodist Church has experienced a decline in membership. Scott's active membership went from nearly 300 in 1993, to roughly 200 active members in 2000, and about 100 active members in 2008. Upon arriving as the new pastor of Scott in 2008, I was met with some who were disappointed that the previous pastor left, some who looked forward to a pastor with a different preaching style, and some who were excited about doing ministry in new ways.

Before coming to serve at Scott in 2008, I was appointed in the prior year to begin exploration of a new church start in Indianapolis. The new church was to have an Africentric focus. I was first approached about this type of church start in 2003 by District Superintendent Rev. James Gentry. He was impressed by the ministry of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois that was led by Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright. As my appointment to Christ United Methodist Church in Gary, Indiana was ending in 2007, District Superintendent Rev. Ned Steele again renewed the conversation about an Africentric<sup>2</sup> United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, and I was appointed to lead its development.

In July of 2007 I began to hold meetings with local United Methodist pastors, United Methodist district and conference leaders, and persons I felt might be interested in being a part of this new ministry. I developed a proposal for how to proceed, and gained the approval of the district's Metro Ministry board, and the conference's Congregational Development board. The name chosen for this new Africentric ministry of the United Methodist Church was "The Way."

<sup>2</sup> The author prefers to use the term "Africentric," as opposed to the more popular term "Afrocentric," because the term "Afri" is the Latin term for the continent of Africa. The term "Afro" generally refers to the kinky hairstyle of black people in America made popular during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Throughout the winter of 2007-2008, I held weekly Sunday morning brunch meetings to invite the community to meet my family and me, and to discuss the concept of an Africentric church.

Michael Joseph Brown defines “Afrocentricity” as “the idea of placing Africa as an ideological construct at the center of biblical investigation....”<sup>3</sup> Because Christian Africentricism is still being shaped as a theological worldview, I developed an opinion about what it is, and what it means. These are some elements that describe an Africentric Christian:

1. They have an authentic Biblical foundation that emphasizes Black presence and influences in the Bible as predominant, which understands that Jesus is Black and opens the scriptures to more accurate interpretations.
2. They use certain African values (i.e., respect for elders, respect for ancestors, respect for the spiritual world, respect for the masculine and feminine aspects of the Creator, respect for the earth/nature and belief in the village working together to raise the children).
3. They utilize/live certain principles, symbols and concepts that come from the African ethos (e.g., the Instructions of Ptah Hotep, the Admonitions of MAAT, the Nguzo Saba of Kwanzaa and Adinkra symbols).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Joseph Brown, *Blackening of the Bible: The Aims of African American Biblical Scholarship* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2004), 54.

4. They use our historical and cultural experiences as a people (i.e., the history of the Coptic (Ancient/Primitive Kemetic Christian) Church, various African liberation movements, the history of the Black Church in America, and the Civil Rights Movement to shape their personal ministry).
5. They celebrate their own African and African American holidays (i.e. Kwanzaa, M.L. King Holiday, Black History Month, African Liberation Day, and Umoja Karamu).
6. They use African, Black and Womanist philosophies and theologies as contexts for living, preaching and Christian education (from past philosophers like Ptah Hotep, Martin R. Delany, Marcus Garvey, etc.; and current theologians like Kwesi Dickson, John Mbiti, James Cones, Jaquelyn Grant, Katie Cannon and others).
7. They are committed to reconciliation and inclusiveness of all people, while appreciating, advocating for, and celebrating African peoples.
8. They have a commitment to a relevant social gospel which represents a firm commitment to Ujima (collective work and responsibility).<sup>4</sup>

In February of 2008 we began holding worship services in an office complex near 46<sup>th</sup> and Keystone. Assisting me in ministry were my wife Valerie, children (Bria and

<sup>4</sup> James C. Anyike, “Elements of the Africentric Christian.” Written in 2016, and published on the James Chikaodili Anyike Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/africentric.christians/about?section=bio&lst=1187555302%3A1655084006%3A1557195771>.

Nia) and good friend Min. Maxine L. Bryant. The services were short, and included music and a message.

It was in May of 2008 that District Superintendent Rev. Bill Knight asked if I would be willing to also pastor Scott United Methodist Church as I continued to develop The Way. I agreed. Since Scott had a second building on its property, we moved The Way into that building. I pastored both ministries simultaneously for the next four years.

My first four years at Scott was a mix of getting to know the people, establishing my position as pastor of Scott, developing The Way, getting more involved in community activism, staying involved in denominational activities, publishing new authors through my publishing company, being a husband, being a father, being the vice president of my seminary alumni association, being president of the conference Black Methodists group, and spending personal time in prayer in God's presence.

The tendency (or ability) to "wear many hats" was something I have always had. As an undergrad at Western Illinois University (1980-1985), in addition to being a fulltime student, I served positions on nearly thirty different boards, committees, and organizations in my four and a half years there. Though I have learned to "eat smaller portions" in serving, I still tend to maintain "a full plate."

The first four years at Scott had its ups and downs. Some members enjoyed my preaching, casual (or contented) attitude, sense of humor, creative ideas, emphasis on children/youth, and my open-door policy. Yet, there were others who felt I was too informal, too involved in the community, not traditional enough, and too busy with trying to lead two churches. At the same time, The Way was growing. Our combined Sunday activities involved the 9 a.m. Sunday School and 10:30 a.m. worship service at Scott, and

then the 1:00 p.m. Life Lessons and 2:00 p.m. service at The Way. Rarely did the two ministries support the activities of the other.

The Way was in a unique position as the only Africentric Christian ministry in Indianapolis. At The Way we held annual celebrations of Kwanzaa, Martin Luther King Day, Black History Month, African Liberation Day, Juneteenth, and Umoja Karamu. We also hosted an open mic poetry event called Kafe Kuumba, and a community development organization called the Ubuntu Freedom Network.

Throughout the week, there was an average of seventy people participating in activities at The Way. As for Scott, it was growing too. There were some members who left in my first year as pastor, but we also had new members join. On average we had ninety people attending Sunday worship at Scott when I became Pastor. That number remains the same today in 2019. However, this is not viewed negatively because we have abated a decline in membership that started in the nineties. Also, we continue to have new confessions of faith and new members that equal or exceed the number of deaths, or members who leave.

Another important ministry that we started at Scott was the Generation to Generation Conference (G2G). I thought it was strange that so few of the children and young people who grew up at Scott were no longer there. I would ask their parents why they thought this happened, but they seemed to not know. Our first G2G was in 2009, and has been held at the end of each summer since. I am convinced that one of the main reasons why many of our churches and businesses are dying is because they basically have no relationship with younger people, and have no plans to. Our success as families,

churches, businesses, and other institutions will be best realized when the generations can understand each other and work with each other.

In my fifth year (2013) there arose a conflict with some members of the Scott Trustee Board who felt that The Way was impeding my ministry at Scott. They complained to Indiana Bishop Michael Coyner, who turned the matter over to the Director of Congregational Development. He later recommended that The Way be discontinued because it had not reached a level of economic self-sufficiency, and did not have enough families participating in its worship services. The Bishop honored this recommendation and The Way was ended in 2014. Those who had come to regularly participate in The Way were deeply disappointed, as was I. Only three of them joined Scott at that time, and two others and their children joined two years later. There was one other member of The Way who regularly attended Scott services, but never joined.

There were some members of Scott who openly stated their disappointment that The Way was discontinued, and how it happened. From 2013 to 2014, there were other conflicts with the Scott Trustee Board. It was at that time that my wife and I separated. Since I had another house that I was renting for my publishing company, I decided that my wife and children should stay in the parsonage while I stayed at the other house. Some members of the Trustee Board felt that if I wasn't staying there, neither should my family. Eventually, this issue died out since I would not budge.

In 2015 things were much better. The issues with the Trustee Board ended with a new chairperson taking leadership. The new Board chairperson was fair minded, loved the church, and understood the political dynamics of the church. She was able to keep the

Trustees focused on making Scott a better place. As tensions with the Trustees ended, I had a fully non-contentious leadership structure to work with.

Since 2015 Scott has experienced growth in numbers and the quality of our ministries. For the first time, since my becoming pastor of Scott, we now have experienced growth in our choir, youth ministry, children ministry, communion stewards, young adult ministry, Bible studies, feeding ministry, community programs, membership, and Sunday worship. Most recently, we have added a mental health ministry, and children's orchestra. We also have young leaders heading our Church Council, serving as our worship leader, and serving on our Trustee Board.

Presently, Scott is in a good position to minister within itself and the local community in several meaningful ways. We will maintain our commitment to building our children, providing programs for the community, promoting spiritual growth, and living out the core values and mission statement we have adopted as a church.

*Scott UMC Core Values (adopted in 2014)*

1. Loving Relationships, loving everyone with the love of God
2. Gift Oriented Ministries, allowing us all to use our gifts in ministry
3. Passionate Spirituality, being most passionate about God's love
4. Functional Structures, all leaders, committees and ministries working
5. Inspiring Worship Services, freely letting the Spirit have its way
6. Holistic Small Groups, that minister to our church and community
7. Pervasive Evangelism, that extends beyond the walls of our church
8. Empowered Leadership, serving with respect, authority, and unity
9. A Caring Community, speaking to each other, not about each other

*Scott Motto (adopted in 2016)*

“Serving Communities Obediently Through the Teachings of Christ.”

### **Ministry Journey**

In 1980, when I enrolled at Western Illinois University (WIU) in Macomb, Illinois, I was afraid that college life would threaten my commitment to Christ. So, a few weeks before I was to start college, I called Rev. Russell Knight, one of my mentors, and shared my fears with him. Russ referred me to Rev. Malcolm White, because he was actively involved in ministering to college students. Mac is a tall, white, and very enthusiastic minister. He self-identified as a “reformed racist,” and he is an assistant minister at a Black church on the west side of Chicago. Mac played a pivotal role in helping me to keep my commitment strong. With his help I started a Bible study in my dorm.

My second year in college was my “break out” year. I got a job as a resident assistant in my dorm. This was great because my tuition was free and I had a room to myself. I had developed some good friendships on campus. I started a gospel music radio program on the campus A.M. station. I joined the Campus Crusade Club at WIU, led by Leo Haggarty. Leo and his wife were great friends to me and I learned much from their commitment to sharing the gospel. However, Campus Crusade’s style of ministry did not completely meet my spiritual needs, nor did it attract the black students on the campus. There was only one Black church in Macomb, IL. It was a Pentecostal church on the far east side of town. The church sent a van to pick up students. It was a nice church, but It didn’t fit my spiritual metabolism. The singing, preaching and style of worship was

different from the Evangelical Covenant church I came to know Christ in. Being away from home gave me a deeper appreciation of what I had in Chicago. Away at school, my family, friends and church were too far. There was nothing I could find in Macomb to replace what I was missing.

There were several black students on campus who felt the same as I did. To meet the need, two other students (Randy Macon and Ronald Perkins) and I decided to start a ministry on campus. We organized more students and began holding Sunday services in the auditorium of one of the academic buildings. The ministry became known as the Christian Faith Black Campus Ministry (CFBCM). We gained a charter from the campus, started a choir and were able to fund a minister to oversee the ministry. Rev. Walter Mobley became our first minister and a great friend and brother. He was a graduate student and led the ministry effectively. This ministry is still active at WIU today.

While I was a student, God was shaping my ministry to include a sensitivity for the specific needs of black people. God began to call me out to respond to injustices that I would see on the campus. I was beginning to realize my role as an instrument of a God who was concerned about the suffering and oppressed.<sup>5</sup> God gave me boldness to challenge oppression without fear. This oppression is motivated by the sinful desires of small groups of people who exploit black people, and anyone else that threaten their power. Many Christians believe God wants us to be silent in the face of racism and ignorance. But I know God is deeply concerned about justice, and calls me to be too. According to the book of Isaiah, God calls on God's people to "Maintain justice, and do

<sup>5</sup> James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York, New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), 117.

what is right...,” (Isaiah 56:1) and God said “For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing....” (Isaiah 61:8). Philosopher Paul Ricoeur makes an important distinction between love and justice. He states that “For love does speak, but it does so in a kind of language other than justice.” For Ricoeur, love is intrinsically good, but justice is a social action that can be manifested in unloving ways.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, God’s love for justice is not for the idea of justice, but for its use as a resource to lovingly judging what’s right from God’s perspective.

For as long as I can remember, I have heard God’s voice and have known God’s spirit. It was this God that brought me through my youth and kept me from submitting to a life of sin. I have become deeply familiar with God’s voice. It is in this God, and this calling from God, that I have learned that God has a magnificent plan for the world and uses God’s people to carry out this plan. This God cares about those who suffer, and has called forth servants to counteract the efforts of those working against this plan. This God works in and through nature, and requires us to play our proper role in caring for the earth. This God hates injustice, and expects God’s servants to work for justice.

It was in this spirit that I served as the leader of a student movement to encourage the university to commit resources to the Afro-American Studies Program (AAS). It was in this spirit, in 1985, that I led a statewide black student organization (the Illinois Alliance of Black Student Organizations) which worked to better educational opportunities for black students; and actively participated in the anti-apartheid movement in the 1980s.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 315-329.

I'm glad that God gave me this unique calling. I began hearing the call as a youth, and responded to it immediately. God has blessed me to be mentored by some of the greatest servants in ministry, who also share this commitment. These mentors include Rev. Walter A. McCray, the author of *Black Presence in the Bible*; Rev. Willie B. Jemison, my first real pastor (Oakdale Evangelical Covenant Church); the late Rev. George E. Riddick, a giant in the Chicago civil rights movement, former vice-president of Operation PUSH, and my pastor for a year at Blackwell African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; the late Dr. William H. Bentley, a profound theologian and a founder of the National Black Evangelical Association; Dr. Ruth Bentley, a leader of the National Black Christian Student Conference; the late Rev. Tom Skinner, a world-famous evangelist and economic strategist; and Dr. Kwame John R. Porter, a well-respected leader of the civil rights movement and my father in the ministry (also former pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in Chicago).

For seven years, before I came to the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in 1997, I was very involved in publishing and public speaking. I authored three books and am involved in helping others publish their writings. I have been blessed to do work that I love. Many people work in fields they have no interest in, but they do it because they have "bills to pay." For most of my adult life, God has allowed my vocations to be my occupations.

Integrating what I learned about ministry and theology before going to seminary at the Interdenominational Theological Center (the ITC) with what I have learned at the ITC was a natural process of growth. My pre-seminary experiences in ministry, research, publishing, social activism, and spiritual development were natural pre-requisites for

what I learned in seminary. I found myself doing many of the same things as before seminary, but then I did them with a higher level of spiritual leading, thorough-ness and professionalism. Whereas I began writing in high school, I then wrote books that were being read throughout the country; and whereas I led Bible classes in college, I learned to properly preach a message that was exegetically and hermeneutically sound and relevant.

At the ITC I experienced greater clarity in who I was personally, what I was capable of achieving intellectually, what I believed theologically, where I stood spiritually, and what I was becoming professionally. Prior to that I had some sense of what direction I was headed in. I grew in understanding about the calling that I answered. This calling was not a guess or a sense, it was a certainty.

I'm particularly pleased to have gained some resolutions in matters I had concerns about. I began resolving biblical concerns by having learned critical techniques in reading the Bible. I began resolving concerns of how I could sustain my family economically by learning to better access resources available to those in ministry. I became better prepared to deal with the spectrum of responsibilities involved in pastoral ministry through what I learned, and I gained a better sense of my own short-comings and my potential for successful ministry.

During the time I was in seminary, I recall how my mother reminded me of the inquisitive nature I exhibited as a child. She said I questioned everything and always wanted to know how things worked. I have never lost this inquisitive nature, and have added to it critical thinking skills I have learned at the ITC.

A critical analysis of my call forces me to measure my personal perspectives on my call against the factual impact of my ministry on others in society, as a way of better

verifying my call. Literary criticism of the scriptures enables me to present the most precise biblical interpretations so that my theology is firmly rooted in proper understanding of the truths of God. In both cases I am better prepared to explain my faith and teach the gospel.

When considering the classes I took, several of them were particularly challenging and enlightening. The Biblical Studies course on the Old Testament taught by Dr. Randall Bailey was liberating for me, because it empowered me to see things in the text I had not seen before. The course on the History of Black Theological Thought taught by Dr. Edward Smith, and the course on Womanist Theology taught by Dr. Jacquelyn Grant fully enlightened me to the methods of doing theology engaged by black people. The course on United Methodist Polity taught by Bishop L. Scott Allen was especially demanding. From Bishop Allen I learned, in detail, how the United Methodist Church functions. Bishops Allen's classes on United Methodist History and Theology were very interesting, and in these classes I really learned what it means to be a Methodist. The World Religion course on African Religions and Philosophies taught by Dr. Tumani Nyajeka was especially enjoyable, and broadened my understanding of African beliefs. Each of the courses I have taken have contributed something valuable to the person I am and still becoming.

After graduating in May 2000, I looked forward to being in pastoral ministry full time as my primary vocation. I have never been one to work a job just for what money it paid. I could not simply have an occupation, unless that occupation was a God inspired vocation.

Being in ordained ministry is not something I take lightly. It is the best way to publicly solidify my commitment to living and spreading the gospel. After graduating from the ITC in 2000, I was appointed to serve in Indiana as an Associate Pastor at University UMC in Indianapolis. I served three years at University, 1 year as an associate at Wesley UMC in Indianapolis, 3 years as Pastor of Christ UMC in Gary, Indiana, five years as Founder and Pastor of The Way in Indianapolis, and now I'm in my twelfth year as Pastor of Scott UMC in Indianapolis.

### Synergy

From the time I accepted my call to ministry in 1995 at Fellowship UMC in Chicago until now, my spiritual life has been like the old song that says “Every round goes higher, higher....”<sup>7</sup> Though my spiritual life has continued to develop, the primary challenge was learning to balance my love life against my love for God life. At this point I am twice divorced and have four children.

Certainly, many of the reasons for my convoluted relational history is me. Though I have been careful to not objectify women, I am only recently developing a clear understanding of the balance of the man and woman in a God inspired and God led relationship. I am better understanding what it means to be in ministry as a husband and a father. My failures in relationship have little to do with what I have done wrong, and everything to do with what I didn’t do right.

<sup>7</sup> William Farley Smith, Arrangement of Afro-American Spiritual. “We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder.” In *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 418. Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989.

Within my immediate family, of my parent's seven remaining children, all seven of us have been divorced. As I look across the congregation I serve, I see so many broken relationships. I don't see my recent divorce as a failure, solely on my part (but, I'm the one telling this story). I see it as a casualty of societies failure to maintain the customs, values and beliefs that helped to encourage, protect and maintain marriage as an institution

I don't think that it is an accident that God's first biblically recognized institution was marriage. It's not to be taken lightly that God viewed Israel as God's mate. And it is important to realize the profound importance of Christ's role as the groom, and the Church's role as the bride. These marital-biblical metaphors speak volumes about God's view of marriage. I am convinced that society runs counter to seeing marriage as God's institution and our marriages are failing. What's worse, the church is failing to see marriage as God's institution and we are failing. The church must learn its role in valuing, encouraging, and protecting marriages. It must also re-establish a commitment to promoting standards that encourage better relationships in the church and community as a whole.

I see the project I will do for this doctoral program as one that studies the devaluing of marriage and relationships in the Black church and Black community, and what efforts must be undertaken to establish the best practices for our tomorrows.

In December of 2016 I shared my ten-year plan with the leaders of Scott. I began the plan officially in July of 2017. If the Lord allows, I desire to serve at least two more years (until 2022) in ministry at Scott Church, and four years teaching at Africa University in Mutare, Zimbabwe. I am thankful that I have maintained good health, but I

realize I won't live on this earth forever. I desire to officially retire at the age of sixty-five in 2027.

I have prayed and reflected on what my priorities as a pastor must be in these last years at Scott. My priorities stem from the three areas I was committed to when I first came to Indianapolis. They are relevant preaching, community development and cultural awareness. In general, I will continue to preach the Gospel in a sound, substantive, spirit led and meaningful way that speaks directly to the purposes God has for the hearers of the Word. I will continue to work to better the health, safety, educational advancement, and productivity of the communities I have opportunity to serve. I will continue to live and teach Africentric values as a way to instill self-worth and pride in how God made us, and brought us this far.

With these commitments in mind, I will seek to emphasize the importance of building and maintaining strong relationships. It is my belief that if my preaching, community service and cultural activities cannot help to produce and maintain meaningful relationships, then I am failing to establish the proper foundation upon which to build relevant preaching, strong communities and cultural awareness.

Within a two-mile radius of Scott Church, seventy percent of the homes are led by single parents, and the marriage rate is 22.4 percent.<sup>8</sup> Within our congregation, there are more people who have been divorced or separated than those married. In my nineteen years of full-time ministry in Indiana, I have conducted approximately forty wedding

<sup>8</sup> United States Census Bureau, "Marital Status in the Center Township, Marion County, Indiana," U.S. Department of Commerce, accessed December 1, 2017, <https://statisticalatlas.com/county-subdivision/Indiana/Marion-County/Center-Township/Marital-Status>.

ceremonies. I always require that the couples allow me to lead them in marital counseling. Using *Growing Love in Christian Marriage* by Joan and Richard Hunt, I conduct four sessions that are two hours each. To the best of my knowledge, only seven of the couples I have married are not still together.<sup>9</sup>

These sessions always challenged me to look at how I approached marriage. No one offered me the counseling that I provide. I have known for some time that my marriage was built on bad foundation. With what I know now, I consider it a miracle that it lasted for as long as it did before we separated.

I have reflected on the strong marriages I know of. I noticed how well they communicate with each other, how they share common values, how much they love each other, and how they share similar beliefs. These are couples that began their relationships with these commitments and continue to build their lives together on them. No relationship is perfect, but the ones with the right foundation last (or last longer), and provide the best foundation for strong churches, communities, and families.

## **Conclusion**

I strongly suspect that the lack of properly established foundations for relationships is a leading factor in the marital, generational, political, religious and racial problems we are facing today.

<sup>9</sup> Hunt, Joan and Richard. *Growing Love in Christian Marriage* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).

Needless to say, I can't "save the world." But, I can work within the church and community I serve, to help establish better foundations for the various categories of relationship within my sphere of influence.

My Doctor of Ministry project seeks to develop concepts and practices that can be used and promoted by churches in the Black community to reduce conflicts and build connections. These practices are being developed to best facilitate healthy relationships in the Black community. I will place special emphasis on exploring the development, maintenance and success of committed relationships as a foundation for healthy families, churches and communities.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-13, Paul shares insights on love's doings in the midst of religious endeavors. His words are a response to various problems that developed within the Corinthian church. Paul sought to develop a sense of law and order within the church with love as the foundation for shared values. It was the development of conflicting values that posed a serious threat to the church at Corinth.

The purpose for which I write here, is to show how the value of Paul's words on love in 1 Corinthians 13 were substantive and profoundly relevant answers to the problems of the church at Corinth, and how they can serve as foundation for developing a system of shared values for the Black community today.

I will begin with an effort to exegete the text by introducing Paul. We will take a brief look at his transition from being a hater (or disunifier) of the Christians, to become a strong force of love (or unifier) of the Church. We will give detail to the Corinthian leg of Paul's missionary journeys. We will look closely at the conflicts that rose in the church at Corinth and Paul's responses to these conflicts. Out of all of Paul's responses, his presentation of love in 1 Corinthians 13 has a power that is transcendent. Paul speaks of love with a level of authority and familiarity that gives hope to those seeking to know and

live love authentically. We will take a deep look at what Paul offers in this text, what it was intended to do for the church at Corinth, and what it meant to the early Church where this letter was shared beyond Corinth.

Finally, this work will be concluded by showing the importance of the text for developing shared values in the Black community. Though the text has value for all who live this call to love, I have chosen to narrow my focus in order to respond to some very specific concerns and conflicts facing black people everywhere we are in the world.

My hope is to develop a system of shared values that can be practically embraced and implemented with love as its foundation. The purpose for developing this system is the same as that of Paul's, in his concern for the church at Corinth, that our efforts be rooted in love so that we live our deepest meaning.

### **The Founder and Founding of the Corinthian Church**

The spread of Christianity during the 1st Century C.E. was led by the Apostles. Eleven of them were personally chosen by Jesus. Their names are Simon Peter, Andrew, James (son of Zebedee), John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus (or Judas, son of James) and Simon the Zealot. The Apostles later chose Matthias, to replace Judas Iscariot, who hung himself after betraying Jesus.

The 1st Century Christians were often forced to meet in secrecy because their teachings greatly clashed with orthodox Jewish beliefs. The Jewish authorities sought to stop the spread of Christianity by force. They authorized a Hellenized Jew, named Saul, to persecute and imprison Christians. However, Saul later became one of the most influential Christian figures of the 1st Century church, known as “the Apostle Paul.”

Paul was born around 8 C.E. in Tarsus in Cilicia. He was well educated on Jewish law, and was a Pharisee. He participated in the persecution of Christians and was responsible for the imprisonment and murder of many. He was converted to Christianity around 35 C.E. and ministered among the Gentile nations for nearly twenty years. He was the only Apostle reported in the Bible to focus his ministry on the Gentile (European) nations. Because of his reputation as a persecutor of Christians, and because he did not require the Gentile converts to observe Jewish laws, he was hated among the Jews and Christians who followed the laws.

Paul claimed that he personally met Jesus during a miraculous encounter on the road to Damascus, and was commissioned by him to be “a chosen vessel” to bear the name of Jesus “before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.”<sup>1</sup> Based on this encounter, Paul is counted as an Apostle, like the original twelve. Paul gives justification for his designation as an Apostle in 1 Corinthians 9:1-2, where he declares “...at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”

Paul’s first meeting with an original Apostle was held three years after his conversion when he stayed 15 days in Jerusalem, where he met with Peter. The teachings of Paul produced a conflict with Jerusalem church leaders and he was pressured to leave Jerusalem.

In Acts chapters 13 to 21, we are provided an outline (though somewhat historically sketchy in some places) of Paul’s missionary journeys. Accordingly, from 46 C.E. to 49 C.E., Paul departed from Antioch and visited Seleucia, Cyprus, Salamis, Paphos, Perga in Pamphylia, Antioch in Pisidian, Iconium, Lystra, Derba, and Attalia.

<sup>1</sup> See Acts 9:15

From 50 C.E. to 52 C.E. Paul travelled to Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra, Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Troas, Phillipi, Thyatira, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Cenchreae, Ephesus, Caesarea, and Jerusalem.

Paul's final missionary journey took place between 53 C.E. and 58 C.E. During this time he travelled to Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece (and possibly Corinth), Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Miletus, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea, and Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

Paul had the physical appearance of an Egyptian. In Acts 21:38 a Roman officer mistook Paul to be a certain Egyptian. Paul had to specify that he was a Jew. It appears that the Egyptians and Jews had physical characteristics indistinguishable to some Romans.

Paul's ministry emphasized the converting of Gentiles. In teaching these Christian proselytes, Paul was of the opinion that they did not have to observe all of the Jewish laws. Paul taught that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised and that they may eat food offered to idol gods. By this he de-emphasizing observance of the Jewish laws.

Peter was the main leader of the Apostles, and James (also called James the Just), the brother of Jesus, became the head of the Christian community in Jerusalem. They represented a segment of 1st Century Christians called "Judaizers." Their belief in Jesus as the Messiah did not preclude their obedience of the Jewish laws. Non-Jewish converts to Christianity were expected to observe the Jewish laws, just as earlier proselytes.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> He stayed in Greece for 3 months according to Acts 20:2-3, and possibly made a second visit to Corinth while he was in the area. This is based on his reference to a second visit there in 2 Corinthians 13:2.

<sup>3</sup> Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Walter DeGruyter, 1987), 118.

This matter was the earliest major controversy to affect the new religion. During Paul's last visit to Jerusalem in 58 C.E., the Judaizers tried to kill him for teaching against the Jewish laws. Sometime between 62 and 67 C.E., Paul was kept under house arrest in Rome, where he was allowed to receive guests and write many letters. Popular tradition says he was put to death in 67 C.E. by the Emperor Nero, who had him beheaded in or near Rome.

The New Testament of the Bible is composed of twenty-seven books by seven writers, and thirteen (or fourteen) of them are believed to have been written by Paul. There are four gospels, one history book (Acts), twenty-one epistles, and one apocalyptic text (Revelation). Paul's writings are all epistles, and are listed here:

- Letters to the Thessalonians 50 to 51 C.E.
- Letter to the Galatians Early to mid 50 C.E.
- Letters to the Corinthians 53 to 56 C.E.
- Letter to the Romans 57 to 58 C.E.
- Letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon 60 to 62 C.E.
- Letters to Timothy 65 C.E.
- Letter to Titus and possibly the Hebrews 63 to 66 C.E.

In writing letters to the various churches that he founded, he sought to share words of encouragement, acknowledge the good work of certain church leaders, give reports on his status, remind them of his love for them, and to respond to various conflicts that he was made aware of.

Paul arrived at Corinth around 50 C.E. According to Acts 18, he met a fellow tentmaker, Aquila, and his wife Priscilla, and stayed with them. Early in its history, Corinth was a major Greek city. It was taken over by the Romans in 146 B.C.E. and re-

founded as a Roman colony in 44 B.C.E. Corinth continued to be occupied by Greeks. It also gained a larger Roman population and some Jews.<sup>4</sup>

When Paul arrived at Corinth, it was a thriving center of trade. Though it was predominantly Roman in culture (i.e., art, writing, Latin names, and architecture), there was an affinity for its Greek qualities among many of the elite Roman and Jewish citizens. Though many of the church leaders in Corinth had Latin names, Paul wrote to them in Greek.

Paul's letters to the church at Corinth stand out as profound, and remained important throughout the history of the Church. The combination of the unique social, political, religious, philosophical, and cultural dynamics of Corinth, and the special spiritual gifts present in the church at Corinth, are important factors as to why his Corinthian letters allow us to take a good look at a wide range of the problems affecting the early Church. The letters present scriptural, inspirational and personal opinions from Paul that continue to influence how the Church is ordered today.

### **Responses to the Conflicts in the Church at Corinth**

Paul's responses to the conflicts between cliques that developed according to baptisms, speaking in tongues, prophetic gifts and theological differences within the church are especially important for the purposes of exegeting 1 Corinthians 13:4-13 as the primary text. It was these conflicts, controversies, concerns or questions that led to Paul's responses to these matters by elevating and illustrating love as the foundation for all religious activities and spiritual gifts. Therefore, I will not deal with all of the issues

<sup>4</sup> Graig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6-7.

Paul responds to in 1 Corinthians or 2 Corinthians, but to those that relate to the chosen scriptures.

Paul's letters to the church at Corinth were written between 53 C.E. and 56 C.E., while he was in Ephesus. He identifies himself and Sosthenes as being together in the writing, or sending of the letter (1 Corinthians 1:1). The first issue that Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians is divisions or disunity based on which spiritual leader various believers identified themselves as disciples of. It is possible that the believers at the heart of the conflict are those who are referred to as "the strong" or "strong people." Some scholars believe them to be early gnostic Jews whose commitment to liberty was a major factor in their interpretation of Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23, Paul quotes the phrase "All things are lawful," which is believed to be a common assertion of the strong. His use of the phrase may be read as a slight mocking of it. He adds to it, "but not all things are beneficial."

In 1 Corinthians 1:10 – 3:23 Paul challenged the religious cliques that developed between those who said "I belong to Paul," or "to Apollos," or "to Cephas" (Peter), or "to Christ." These divisions involved arguments about whose name one was baptized in, and the level of spiritual depth and intellectual acumen one saw them self as having according to who they followed. Paul's response puts the emphases on the proclamation of the gospel, and not on the baptism. He further emphasizes God's wisdom imparted to all believers through the Spirit, as being above the "wisdom of the wise." By this standard of God's wisdom, the wisdom of the wise was foolishness, and all believers proclaimed a truth about Christ that is higher than anything man had already regarded as wise.

<sup>5</sup> Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, 121. See also, John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 115.

Simultaneously, what the believers proclaimed equated to foolishness in the minds of those who did not believe. This equalized all believers as having the same wisdom, regardless of their own intellectual level, or the level they associate with their respective spiritual leader. Paul redirects them from boasting about their cliques, to “boast in the Lord.” He identifies himself, along with Apollos and Peter, as instruments of God given to them all to build them up as “God’s temple,” and that they all “belong to Christ.”

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul maintains the call to unity established in chapters 1 to 3. Whereas he earlier responded to how they separated themselves according to cliques based on spiritual leaders, in chapter 12 Paul responds to their separating themselves according to whose spiritual gifts are most important.

The spiritual gifts identified are speaking with wisdom, speaking with knowledge, to have faith, the gifts of healing, to do miracles, to prophesy, and discernment. Paul speaks of these gifts as being important parts of the same body. Just as the different parts of the physical body (i.e., eyes, ears, nose, hands, feet, etc.) contribute to the overall functionality of a person, so do the various spiritual gifts contribute to the functioning of the body of Christ as a whole.

It is likely that Paul found this conflict to be quite un-nerving. As he dealt with the issue of believers taking each other to court, his frustration is almost palpable (in 1 Corinthians 6:5) where he says “I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, but a believer goes to court against a believer—and before unbelievers at that?”

Considering the fact that the church at Corinth had all of these wonderful gifts functioning among them, it leaves no doubt that the Spirit was with them. Paul says

several times, that these gifts are imparted to individuals by the Spirit. It had to be frustrating to have those who were gifted with wisdom, knowledge, discernment and prophesy, yet they did not see that they are all necessary. Neither do we hear of those who had the gift of various tongues having the words to persuade the others of their mutual value.

This must have also been frustrating because it reveals the levels of selfishness, egotism, meanness, lack of cohesion, and disrespect that was present in this church community. It is this same frustration that church leaders (especially pastors) have encountered throughout the history of the Church. These negative attitudes are present in every church to some degree.

Paul states that their respective gifts are given as “manifestations of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7) He uses this utilitarian approach to begin his efforts to diffuse this conflict by revealing how the individual gifts serve practical purposes for the whole body of Christ. Furthermore, he wants them to clearly see their individual uniqueness, but he also wants them to see how their individual “members” are a part of one spiritual/symbiotic whole that involves the body of Christ (in the world) with God who activated it all.<sup>6</sup>

Hans Conzelmann points out the important element of this activation as found in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. He identifies an underlying triadic formula of God—Lord—Spirit frequently found in the New Testament, represented by “gifts of grace—acts of service—operations,” ascribed to the Spirit in the text. Accordingly, gifts of grace goes with the

<sup>6</sup> Tokunboh Adeyemo, Editor, *Africa Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1392.

Spirit, acts of service goes with the Lord, and operations goes with God.<sup>7</sup> Herein Paul presents various unifiers in an effort to explain the one body.

### **Love as the Foundation**

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul moves from the individual gifts, to reveal “the greater gift,” love. The responses given by Paul to the concerns of chapter 12 were quite sufficient. But, the addition of chapter 13 is profound.

From chapters 1 thru 12, Paul’s writing moves as one going through a checklist as he responds to the various concerns. He moves from encouragement, to instructions, to comparisons, to proclamations, to accusations, to personal views, to Spirit led views, to scriptural views, to judgements, to mocking, to defensiveness, to self-deprecation, to preaching, and then ultimately to love poetry in chapter 13.

The transition begins with 1 Corinthians 12:31 where Paul says “But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.” The change in tone from the high energy presentations in Chapters 1 thru 12, are not continued in chapter 13. It’s as if Paul has gotten some rest before continuing. I imagine him waking from a good nap, drinking some tea and reflecting on all he has already shared. Then he takes a deep breath and introduces the “still more excellent way” of love.

It’s interesting to note that Paul only uses the word love (*agape* ἀγάπη) twice before Chapter 13. He uses it in chapter 4, verse 21, where he rhetorically asks if he should come to them “with a stick, or with love in the spirit of gentleness.” He was speaking to them as a “father” of arrogant children that he might have to beat upon his

<sup>7</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1975), 207.

return. This further illustrates his level of frustration. He also uses agape in chapter 8, verse 1, referring to it as that which “builds up,” in juxtaposition to knowledge that “puffs up.” It is obvious that, in chapter 13, love takes on a much more important presence than that which facilitates gentleness or builds up.

Kahlil Gibran, in *The Prophet*, says “When you love you should not say, ‘God is in my heart,’ but rather, ‘I am in the heart of God.’ And think not you can direct the course of love, for love, if it finds you worthy, directs your course.”<sup>8</sup> In chapter 13 Paul speaks of having love, but describes something much more than possessing a quality, but more like being possessed by an entity. In the text, love comes alive and moves from a one-dimensional supporting role in the story of the church at Corinth, to a multi-dimensional starring role. Accordingly, all of the lofty gifts of angelic tongues, prophetic powers, understanding all mysteries, having all knowledge, or having mountain moving faith are all reduced to nothingness without love.

He even adds (in verse 3) giving away all of one’s possessions and handing over one’s body to martyrdom<sup>9</sup> as having no value without love. These were regarded as the highest sacrifices one could make in the early Church. But Paul classifies them as producing no gain without love.

<sup>8</sup> Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf Publisher, 1923), 13.

<sup>9</sup> “Biblical Hermeneutics Stack Exchange” Biblical Hermeneutics Beta, accessed April 26, 2018, <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/12950/what-is-paul-giving-his-body-over-to-in-1-corinthians-133>. Assuming the future indicative passive of καίω, “I may be burned,” to be more accurate than the aorist middle subjunctive of καυχαομαι, “I may boast.”

John Wesley preached “Love” is God, and within the nature of all that God created is Love (God). This fits in with the animation and deification (based on its perfect attributes) of love in the text.<sup>10</sup>

The love that Paul describes here is also received unqualified. He does not speak of it as something received when someone reaches a certain spiritual plateau, anyone can receive and share it. If it is received without qualifiers, it must be shared likewise. Bishop Julius Trimble says it this way, “To love God means, for me, to love all of God’s people. This love does not come with a qualifying ‘but....’ I love you...period!”<sup>11</sup>

### Word Study

This brings us to our primary text, 1 Corinthians 13:4-13. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible renders it in this way:

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;<sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Albert C. Outler, Editor, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 4* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1987), 294.

<sup>11</sup> Julius Calvin Trimble, *A Faithful Church and A Healthy World* (Des Moines, IA: Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church, 2015), 67.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, editors, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible New Revised Standard Version* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 243 NT – 244 NT.

A deeper look at the terms used in this text will allow us better insight into what is being conveyed. Naturally, we must begin with the word love. Several Greek terms in the New Testament are translated as “love.” They are ἀγαπάω (*agapao*), φιλέω (*phileō*), and ἀγάπη (*agape*).

The term *agapao* is a verb, and it means to love someone or something. It is this kind of love that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 2:9, where he writes “But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.’”

The term *phileao* is a verb, and it means to love someone affectionately or kindly, or to be very friendly with someone. This is the love Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 16:22a, where he writes “Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord.”

The term *agape* is a noun, and it means affection or benevolence, charity, and a love-feast. It is the term Paul uses throughout 1 Corinthians 13. It’s commonly defined as unconditional love, or love that is given with no expectation of receiving something in return. Paul’s description of love in chapter 13 presents it as having identity and personality that are alive. Love is brought to life in such a way that it falls just short of anthropomorphism. It makes sense that this would be the case, because it is embodied in the life of Christ, and it is to continue its human form through those of the Church who live it.

All the qualities of love shared answer those qualities not being lived out by the church at Corinth. By sharing these qualities, Paul is establishing qualities

that must be shared amongst the believers if they are to be the unified body of Christ they can be.

The first quality of love is patience (μακροθυμέω - *makrothymeō*).

Patience means to continuously bear trials without grumbling. This quality fits well with 1 Corinthians 7. Keeping in mind that Paul believes that Christ's return is imminent<sup>13</sup>, he provides instructions for maintaining the status quo under several difficult circumstances.<sup>14</sup> Paul advises that men be abstinent, that married couples remain married, that married couples remain sexually active, that unmarried people remain unmarried, that believers remain married to unbelievers, that the circumcised remain circumcised, that the uncircumcised remain uncircumcised, that the enslaved remain in slavery, that the virgin maintain their virginity, and that the engaged remain engaged. He sums it up in verse 24 by saying "In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God."

Depending on the persons involved, and their ability to tolerate what is uncomfortable for them, patience is the quality of love that they would need to endure. There must have been those who were not remaining abstinent, had multiple sexual partners, getting divorced, changing their circumcision status, and escaping slavery. The confusion and discord these issues produced led to Paul receiving reports, and his responses to them.

<sup>13</sup> As evident in 1 Corinthians 1:7

<sup>14</sup> William Graham Cole, *Sex and Love in the Bible* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1959), 292-293.

It is likely that Paul would have given different advice regarding some of these issues if he knew that the return of Christ would not happen for hundreds of years. Nevertheless, he was calling the believers to a commitment to patience.

The second quality of love is that it is kind (*χρηστεύομαι* – *chrēsteuomai*). To be kind means to have a friendly attitude toward others. This quality is a fitting response to several of the issues impacting the church at Corinth. But, one stands out to me—the quarrels that “Chloe’s people” told Paul about in chapter 1, verse 11. As I stated earlier, about the religious cliques that developed between those who said “I belong to Paul,” or “to Apollos,” or “to Cephas” (Peter), or “to Christ.”

It’s one thing to simply defend one’s position on a matter, but it’s another thing to become unkind in advocating a position. Their quarrels over this matter caused a great division among them. This division would not have occurred if they held a friendly attitude toward one another as they held to their beliefs. Kindness does not require consent, nor does it allow condescension. Though their respective opinions did need theological readjustment, they did not have to lead to division.

The third, fourth and fifth qualities of love are that it is not envious (*ζηλόω* – *zēloō*), not boastful (*περπερεύομαι* – *perpereuomai*), and not arrogant (*φυσιόω* – *physio*). The qualities of being envious, boastful and arrogant share the same egotism and animus toward another. To be envious is to have resentment against another’s success. To be boastful is to speak with pride, or to brag excessively about oneself. To be arrogant is to have an exaggerated sense of self, or to have overbearing pride to the point that one is

discourteous to another. Very often, one who is envious about someone else's success, or progress, feels inferior to them. In an effort to overcome feelings of inferiority, they may develop justifications for seeing themselves as superior. To have a superiority complex is to be arrogant. In order for arrogance to move from the isolated mind, it must be shared by the mouth, or communicated to others in some way. To share one's beliefs in their superiority is boasting.

In chapter 3, verse 3, Paul writes "for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?" It is implied here that in their boasting about the leaders of their respective cliques, they also harbored some jealousy. Jealousy most certainly leads to envy. Paul clearly sees these human inclinations as contrary to the spiritual mind. If they would have developed a pattern of celebrating the success and growth of other believers, who they saw as different from themselves, there would be no room for envy, boasting and arrogance. Paul reminds them that all believers are "God's servants," and are called to work together. (*chapter 3, verse 9*)

The sixth quality of love is that it is not rude (*ἀσχημονέω – aschēmoneō*). To be rude is to act in a way that offends or repulses another. In chapter 7, verse 36, Paul suggest that one who is engaged should avoid being rude to his fiancée. In this case, the man is improperly pressuring his fiancée by tempting her to submit to his sexual desires, or by forcing her to before marriage. Paul advices that they marry, or that he get his "desires under control" and they remain engaged.

In the middle 1<sup>st</sup> Century, and throughout most of world history, the woman was generally the property of her father or husband. The fiancée is the property of the one she

is promised to, the same as if they were married. Currently, the standards are much different in some parts of the world. In the past, female genital mutilation, arranged marriages, child marriages, and restrictions on women owning property were commonplace. For women who move from Africa or the Middle East to America, if a man were to impose these on a woman (or child), it would not only be rude in all cases, but illegal as well in some.

This quality of love, of not being rude, is one that many Christians fail to adhere to. It is sad that many Christians are rude to others based on race, political party, sexual orientation, gender, country of origin, health status, or class.

The seventh quality of love is that it does not insist ( $\zeta\eta\tau\epsilon\omega$  – *zēteō*) on its own way. This insisting involves someone demanding that something is done to serve their interest. In chapter 10, verses 23-24, Paul deals with those who argue that “all things are lawful.” They are known as “the strong,” and they believed that they could eat certain foods (regardless of being offered to idols) or engage in certain sexual acts, as long as they didn’t violate the Jewish laws.<sup>15</sup> Paul argued that it may be lawful, but not beneficial. He advised them by saying “Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the others.” Paul was concerned about the conscience of those who might take offense to the strong believer who does not care how his actions might be viewed by others. Paul suggests that it is better to surrender their liberty, so that others might be saved.

The eighth quality of love is that it is not irritable ( $\pi\alpha\rho\zeta\upsilon\omega$  – *paroxynō*). To be irritable is to be easily provoked to anger. At the very beginning of Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth he refers to the “quarrels” within the church. It is fair to conclude that

<sup>15</sup> Charles Hodge. *An Exposition of 1 Corinthians* (Albany, NY: Books for the Ages, 1997), 126.

these quarrels involved some “hot headed” believers. As a church that had clear divisions and conflicts, it would take very little for adversaries to be irritated with each other. In many churches today where there are conflicts, one member may get angry by just seeing someone they are at odds with.

Paul broaches the subject of their quarreling by first saying that they should all “be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” This is consistent with Paul’s reminders throughout the text that they are all one body. Therefore, any irritability or injuries to another believer is a self-inflicted wound.

The ninth quality of love is that **it** is not resentful (*κακός – kakos*). To be resentful is to harbor evil thoughts or desires. In chapter 10, verses 6-10, Paul warns them against desiring evil as their ancestors did in the wilderness. He recounts how they were killed or severely punished when they worshiped idols, indulged in sexual immorality, spoke against God, or when they complained.<sup>16</sup>

Truly, we calculate sins in our thoughts, before we carry them out with our bodies. Paul’s use of this “fire and brimstone” approach to warning the believers is interesting. He speaks with prophetic certainty in connecting the journey of their ancestors with their existence as the Church. He wants them to know that what happened among their ancestors specifically happened as a sign and warning for them. He uses it as more than a cautionary tale, but more like a large flashing traffic sign that reads “Don’t even think about coming this way, or you will die a painful death.”

<sup>16</sup> See Exodus 32:4-6, Numbers 25:1-9, Numbers 21:5-6, and Numbers 16:13-14

The tenth quality of love is that it does not rejoice ( $\chiαίρω$  – *chairō*) in wrongdoing ( $\grave{\alpha}\deltaικία$  – *adikia*). Wrongdoing is to do an injustice or unrighteousness. Here Paul uses the encompassing term, “all wrongs,” and speaks to the gladness one should not feel when wrong is done. The believers are not to be comfortable or cheerful when someone is done wrong, or something wrong is done. The fact that the text does not say “love does no wrong” may seem to be missing. But, the idea that love does no wrong is well established by the qualities of love already identified. However, what Paul feels must be said is that it doesn’t rejoice in doing wrong or seeing it either.

To rejoice (*chairō*) means to be glad or well. When we do wrong with a sense of gladness or satisfaction about the harm it causes another, it is in the absence of love. This also applies to how we feel glad when the car that cut us off gets hit by a truck driven by someone “under the influence,” or when someone we hate gets shot. “Good for them,” we may say, or “They got what they deserve.” Love cannot celebrate when someone else is wronged, no matter how much we feel that it’s karma.

The eleventh quality of love is that it rejoices ( $\sigmaυγχαίρω$  – *sygchairō*) in truth ( $\grave{\alpha}\lambdaήθεια$  – *alētheia*). Unlike *chairo* (*to rejoice*), *sygchairo* (*rejoices*) means to take joy in, or share in the joy of another. The whole of verse 6 is wonderful imagery. It presents love’s rejection of being joyful for all that is wrong, vis-à-vis love’s sharing in the joy of all that is truth. Truth is that which is true completely, in all matters. This text presents love as being in a consistent role of repeatedly rejoicing with truth, and never rejoicing in that which is wrong.

In addition to love rejoicing repeatedly, it must rejoice in unity. In chapter 12, verse 26b, Paul says “if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” Far too

often, when someone in a church is honored, there are those in the pew who feel no joy. Some even feel envy, or they justify in their minds the many reasons why they believe the person is unworthy. This is not how love works.

The twelfth quality of love is that it bears (*στέγω – stegō*) all things. To bear means to endure, or to take control over or carry all things that may pose a threat. In chapter 9, verse 12, Paul speaks of bearing the burden of not requiring payment for the ministry he provides. He makes a compelling argument for why he would be justified in requiring them to do so. But instead, he accepted whatever freewill gifts given to him.

What's more challenging about love is that it bears all things, not just some things. When I was a child, schoolyard fights were often preceded by someone drawing a line on the ground and daring their adversary to cross it. Most of us have "a line." Within the line are the things we are willing to bear. When someone crosses the line, we may "lose" our "religion" and act in very un-Christ like ways. But love has no line. It may have its frustrations, but it will carry the burden.

The thirteenth quality of love is that it believes (*πιστεύω – pisteuō*) all things. To believe means to be persuaded, or to commit to something you know to be true. Belief is a fundamental theme throughout the scriptures. It appears 264 times in the Bible, and is the foundation for salvation and miracles. Jesus spoke of believing profusely. One of the many powerful lessons on belief is found in Mark 5:35-36, where Jesus told Jairus "Do not fear, only believe." Jairus had just received word that his daughter, who he hoped Jesus would heal, had died. In any other circumstance Jairus would have done right to follow common sense and not believe. But, by believing, he led Jesus to his house, and his daughter was resurrected.

In Mark 6:5 we see the opposite of faith, where he could do no “deed of power” in his hometown, because of their “unbelief.” But love does not choose to believe some parts of the truth and ignore other parts, it believes all things that it knows to be the truth. In Romans 10:9 Paul summarizes the truth by saying “... if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

The fourteenth quality of love is that it hopes ( $\varepsilon\lambda\pi\iota\zeta\omega$  – *elpizō*) all things. To have hopes means to have positive expectations and confidence in something. Again, the addition of “all things” removes the fetters that we may put on love, and allows it to hope for the fulfillment of all things ordained to be. In chapter 15, verse 19, Paul responds to those who restricted their hope to belief in salvation through Christ without belief in resurrection. Paul argues that without the resurrection, salvation has no foundation and all future expectations for resurrection are futile. Without resurrection, the believers would never gain imperishable bodies and eternal life.

With hope, love has the ability to look to the future and remind itself that the promises of God are true before they are fulfilled. With hope, love expects and desires that God’s kingdom will come.<sup>17</sup>

The fifteenth and final quality of love is that it endures ( $\nu\pi\omega\mu\acute{e}v\omega$  – *hypomenō*) all things. To endure means to remain faithful despite opposition. Opposition is an existential reality for those who serve God. From the very beginning of the Hebrew Bible to the final page of the Apocalypse of John, there is opposition of every kind.

<sup>17</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroad* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 126.

Within the church at Corinth opposition took the form of cliques in competition with each other, cultural/social barriers between believers and nonbelievers, legal challenges from Jewish and Roman authorities, challenges to Paul's authority and teachings, and temptations of all kinds.

It is generally accepted that every person has a breaking point. We can endure deprivation, or oppression to a certain degree, before relenting or breaking. But love can withstand all of the pressure that the opposition can put on it. Love remains faithful through the wrong that is done to it, lies that are told of it, and weight that is placed on it.

Likewise, the believer is called to tap into the enduring power of love that he/she may endure. It will not make the believer invincible, just enabled to go further than ever thought possible. That's when God takes over to carry the faithful all the way.

### **The Conclusion**

We live in very challenging times. These times remind me of the church at Corinth, in that it was marvelously blessed with spiritual powers and gifts, yet it was full of divisions, false teachings and sinfulness. Similarly, we live in a world that has accomplished the greatest medical and technological achievements in history. Man is sending spacecrafts throughout the galaxy, has created artificial intelligence that can think for itself, developed genetic methods to rewrite the DNA sequence, and has communication systems that connect every corner of the earth at the same time. In Corinth they had profound gifts of communication by the miracles of tongues, yet they didn't have the words to speak unity to their broken places. Are we not worse off than them?

We have enough weaponry to destroy the world several times. Pornography and sex trafficking contort the concept of sexual affection (*eros*) into a hideous parasite infecting the heart of humanity. Racial hatred and conflict, fueled by an insidious ideology of white supremacy, has distorted our views of who our neighbor is, to the point that Martin Luther King's utopian hope for the "beloved community" is a fanciful notion.

The sad and honest truth is that love (*agape*) has not eliminated any of these threats from the world. It would be so wonderful if history recorded that love won in Corinth to the point that Paul's call to love convicted the hearts of the believers and they purged themselves of false teachings, immorality, division and egotism. However, the truth is Paul's relationship with the church at Corinth deteriorated, and eventually the church probably did too.

Despite these realities, there is yet a greater reality—that love has not failed, because love is not finished. Love is always in motion, being constantly extended from the Creator to the created, and all throughout nature. In some places love (*agape, agapao, phileo and eros*) flows freely and abundantly, and in other places, it trickles. It can flow freely from heart to heart in a deeply moving family gathering, but it can also trickle slowly in the church where the people resist loving.

Paul deeply believed in love (*agape*). Yet, a strong argument can be made that he was not the best candidate to deliver the call to love in the church at Corinth, or anywhere else. Paul had the baggage of having been a persecutor of the Church, advocate of beliefs against the Jewish laws, viewed often as more talk than action, too often absent due to open itineracy, and at times perceived as being of uncertain ethnicity. But, love can use anyone who is willing to grab hold of it when it comes near.

It is my determination to promote and popularize shared values for the Black community that can generate healthy love (*agape, agapao, phileo and eros*) relationships. This system will provide ideological and practical methods for grabbing hold to love (*agape*) and conveying it in the places where it is either trickling or not flowing at all. It must begin with individuals who allow love (*agape*) to be realized in the ways Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

There are countless numbers of persons whose lives have been transformed throughout history. They were changed from those who committed vile acts, to those who became profoundly selfless in their service to others. In too many Black communities, there is a self-hatred that causes economic, cultural, physical, medical, sociological, legal and psychological problems. The physical impacts of slavery, the psychological impacts of racial programming, and the systematic impacts of institutional racism have created circumstances that make it nearly impossible for black people to collectively overcome in America. Similarly, the impacts of colonialism in Africa, and pressures on black people to conform or assimilate to accommodate the comforts of other races, has resulted in protracted racial oppression worldwide. The one who commits murder, sells drugs, assaults others, is addicted to drugs, hates others and hates his blackness, is probably like that because of self-hatred. But, self-hatred can be defeated by self-love.

Many of the sociological, political, institutional and individual manifestations of hatred toward black people can be overcome when there are those who are committed to be patient, kind, not envious, not boastful, not arrogant, not rude, not insistent on having their own way, not irritable, not resentful, not happy when wrong is done, glad when truth wins, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.

Many people's lives have been transformed when their self-hatred was overcome by their experiences with persons who loved (*agape, agapao, phileo and/or eros*) them authentically.

These are things that cannot be legislated. These things won't happen because we hold a press conference, do a march, or "hope and pray" for it. It will happen because of those who have a love (*agape*) experience, and are compelled to share it.

This effort will not change the world, God will do that in due time. But it most certainly can change a community. It may begin with an individual, and then spread to a household, and then spread to a city block, and then to a community.

In Corinthian, they had all the gifts they needed to miraculously transform their city. If the church at Corinth would have used their gifts as one body, they would have revealed to all of the Jews, Greeks, Romans and others of their town, a manifestation of who God is that would have been undeniable. This is the work of all who have known God's love. Those who experience it can't help but share it.

Love must be manifested through the care shown by the local teacher, protection rendered by the local police officer, services rendered by the laborers manufacturing goods locally, hospitality given by pastors who open the doors of the church daily, and parents who honor their God given role to be the best reflections of God's love in the lives of their children.

Love must be given access to the darkest and most difficult places of our lives and communities, so that it can do, in some places now, what it must ultimately do in all places when the time comes.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

In 313 C.E. the Edict of Milan was signed by Emperor Constantine, ending nearly 300 years of Christian persecutions. From the 1<sup>st</sup> Century to the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century various meetings were held by Church leaders to develop agreement and uniformity in Christian theology and practices. Before the Edict of Milan these decisions were made by various influential local Christian bodies, with practically no interests or influences by the Roman government.<sup>1</sup> It was in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century that more formal synods and councils began to be held, and many of the standards of Christian theology, history, biblical canonicalization and polity were established.

Important in the early Church were the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E., the Synod of Hippo in 393 C.E., the Synod of Carthage in 397 C.E., the Council of Chalcedon in 451 C.E., and several other important meetings.

The focus herein is limited to the synods and councils of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries that shaped the early Church. These events represent a commitment to Christian unity

<sup>1</sup> New Advent, “African Synods,” Catholic Encyclopedia, accessed May 6, 2019, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01199a.htm>

that made it possible for the Church to develop shared values on key theological, scriptural and ecclesiastical matters. During this time the “stage was set” for Church and state interactions that will continue throughout the span of Christian history.

The first order of business will be to explain how and why Church synods and councils came to be. Special attention will be given to the three primary sees (Alexandria Egypt, Antioch and Rome) of the Early Church, and how regional interests influenced why these meetings happened, when they did and where they did.

It’s interesting to consider the ways nationalism influenced the development of the Early Church. The churches of the northern Mediterranean regions, Palestinian regions and northern African regions had their own cultural differences, yet they were very uniform in their religious commitments. Similarly, Antioch and Rome had larger Gentile (Hellenistic) populations, and produced more Gentile converts.<sup>2</sup>

It’s important to point out that racism had no influence in how the Early Church viewed itself, though there were occasional hints of nationalistic tension. These tensions became more evident as the theological differences of opinion set one region against another.

Considering the internal conflicts within the Church, the external conflicts within the Roman Empire, and the theological conflicts posed by those who the Church identified as heretics, it’s a miracle that the Church made it through its first five hundred years. The Church worked through its challenges to develop and maintain shared values that continue to sustain it today.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1982), 9.

Through this writing, it will be shown how similar efforts can produce agreements on shared values. The final project, of which this is one part, centers around developing and promoting a system of shared values for the Black community. Since the Early Church was able to work through its differences to develop shared values, the processes they used will provide guidance for developing, implementing and maintaining shared values in geographical areas where churches are present today.

### **The Establishing of Church Synods and Councils**

The first recorded meeting of Church leaders (referred to as the *sui generis*) took place in Jerusalem in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, and is recorded in Acts 15. Various local councils and synods were held in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries, during times when persecutions were not severe. It was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century that regularly scheduled synods began to be held in North Africa. The decisions made at these meetings were formally conveyed to the other regions, and generally accepted as official throughout the Christian world.<sup>3</sup>

During the first 500 years of the Church, its leaders sought to establish doctrinal consistency and ecclesiastical unity. The word “*catholic*” (meaning universal), was used to describe this concept of a unified Christian Church, to the exclusion of the ones designated as heretical. Though the Church never reached the level of ecclesiastical unity it sought, it did achieve a level of doctrinal consistency.

There were 3 primary sees in the Early Church. They were Alexandria, Antioch and Rome. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jerusalem was the primary base for Christianity. When

<sup>3</sup> Karl Rahner, editor, *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (London, England: Burns and Oates, 1975), 298.

Jerusalem was sieged and the Temple destroyed by the Roman army in 70 C.E., the focus of Christianity shifted to Alexandria, Egypt. It was there that the largest number of diasporic Jews lived at that time. There were an estimated 200,000 Jews living in Alexandria and more than one million living throughout Lower (Northern) Egypt.<sup>4</sup> The Apostles began their mission by reaching Jewish communities through the synagogues of the Roman Empire. Because of the large Jewish communities in Egypt, and easy access between Palestine and Egypt, it is only natural that the Jews of Alexandria were among the first to be introduced to Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Adolf von Harnack, historian of Christianity, is quoted as saying, “It is more than a conjecture that a larger number of Jews were converted to Christianity in the Nile Valley than anywhere else.”<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, it was in North Africa that Christian monasticism, Christian education, and the preserving of the scriptures primarily took place.

Rome was important in the Early Church because of the spread of Christianity by Paul among the Gentiles. It gained even more importance with the toleration of Christianity in 313 C.E., after the Council of Milan and the Edict of Milan that was signed by Constantine.<sup>7</sup> With Rome being the seat of power for the Empire, the Roman Church shared cultural and geographic affinities with the Roman government. Over time, the Roman Church became the de facto head of Christianity throughout the Roman

<sup>4</sup> C.P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa* (London, England: Lutterworth Press, 1948), 39.

<sup>5</sup> Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Walter De Gruyter, 1987), 220.

<sup>6</sup> C.P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Albert Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History* (Philadelphia, PA: Judson Press, 1933), 306-307.

Empire. In a sense, the Roman Church took over the role of maintaining the religious interest of the Empire in 324 C.E. when Constantine defeated his co-Emperor Licinius. For the remainder of his life, Constantine engaged in efforts to build churches and build up Christianity. These efforts included converting pagan facilities into Christian facilities, outlawing some pagan rites, outlawing practices and beliefs determined to be heretical, and facilitating various Church councils.

There were many different theological, social and political issues that contributed to Church conflicts, and ultimately, the splitting of the Church. Some of the factors included the attempts of Bishops of Rome and Alexandria to gain supremacy over one another's sees; factionalism produced from diverse theological perspectives; and political manipulation of the Church by imperial authorities. Though there were many issues that threatened Church unity, the Donatists and Arian controversies, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, were the major threats.<sup>8</sup>

### **Church Councils Confronting the Donatist Controversy**

Scriptural manuscripts were widely distributed and discussed among early Christians in North Africa. During certain periods of Roman persecution, scriptural documents were confiscated and destroyed. One of the most severe instances was around 300 C.E., during the persecution of Emperor Diocletian. Some local Church leaders turned over their manuscripts to save their lives. After the persecution ended, and Constantine declared toleration of Christianity, those Church leaders who turned over the

<sup>8</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume I* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2010), 175-176.

sacred books were viewed as traitors (and called *traditors*). This sparked the Donatist controversy, a movement led by Donatus, Bishop of Carthage, to declare the religious authority of the traitors as invalid.<sup>9</sup> This was one of the earliest instances where the Roman Church (based in Rome) clashed with the African Church (Based in Alexandria, Egypt).

Pope Miltiades of the Roman Church (who was also an African) consecrated a traditor named Caecilian as the Bishop of Carthage after Donatus had served. Donatus and other church leaders on North Africa refused to acknowledge his authority or validity to conduct church rites (and therefore they considered any rites he conducted as invalid). In their opinion, unless he went through a rigorous ordination process, he would not be respected as a Bishop. They then appealed to Emperor Constantine to intervene. This intervention set the pace for future power dynamics involving rulers and Church leaders. In this case Constantine called for the Council of Arles in 314 C.E. This council was largely led by bishops friendly to the Roman Church. They decided against the Donatists. They also decided to excommunicate Donatus, and declared Donatism as heretical.

### **Church Councils Confronting the Arian Controversy**

The next major issue was the Arian Controversy. It started around 324 C.E. in Alexandria when an Egyptian Church leader named Arius conflicted with Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, regarding the teachings of Origen on the nature of Christ. Alexander's successor, Athanasius, became the champion in confronting Arius' views.

<sup>9</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Early Christianity* (Lane/Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing, 1984), 64-65. Also, Anyike, *Historical Christianity African Centered*, 120.

Origen taught of the “eternal, timeless generation” of the Son of God, but he made the Son (Jesus) subordinate to the Father (God). Arius supported the idea of a subordinate relationship and rejected the concept of an eternal generation. He stated that a “generation” cannot be “timeless.” Arius asserted that there was a point in time when the generation of Christ started, giving him a point of beginning. He taught that Jesus was the “first born” of all creation, God’s agent in the creation of all else and subject to change because he was a created being. This description of the Son is identical to the description of Amen in Egyptian mythology, and may be one reason why it was rejected as heretical.<sup>10</sup>

Under these tense circumstances, Constantine called for the first ecumenical council in order to resolve this matter. It was held in 325 C.E. in Nicaea, located on the Anatolia Peninsula, in the northwest section, south of the Black Sea. Constantine invited nearly 1800 bishops and Church leaders from all parts of the Roman Empire. According to Athanasius, approximately 318 people attended the meeting. Since the primary persons involved (Arius and Athanasius) were from Alexandria, Egypt, there was a large contingent from North Africa.<sup>11</sup>

At Nicaea, Athanasius argued that if the Son is not eternally the Son, then neither is the Father’s role eternal. If the Son is subject to change, there is no sure ground for the doctrine of eternal salvation. The Council of Nicaea declared Arianism as heretical and concluded that “the Son is one being, or essence, or substance with the Father, and those

<sup>10</sup> Anyike, *Historical Christianity African Centered*, 38-39.

<sup>11</sup> Phillip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series 2, Volume 4* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2001), 23.

that say that he was made out of nothing, or that his being is different from that of the Father are anathema.”<sup>12</sup>

The Council codified their decisions in the Nicene Creed. This was the first statement of belief for the Christian Church. It was documented as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down, and became incarnate, and became man, and suffered, and rose again on the third day, and ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and dead,

And in the Holy Spirit.

But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and, Before being born He was not, and, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance, or created, or is subject to alteration or change - these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes

The issue did not end with the decisions made at Nicaea. It smoldered and eventually grew into a raging controversy that eventually led to the splitting of the Church. The decisions reached at the Council of Nicaea were reversed at an Arian-controlled council meeting held in Tyre in 335 C.E. In 356 C.E. opponents of Arianism were forced into exile by the Emperor Constantius, who was an Arian. This period of exile ended in 361 C.E. and another short period of exile began in 364 C.E.

<sup>12</sup> Bainton. *Early Christianity*, 68.

In 381 C.E. Emperor Theodosius I, a strict Christian orthodox against Arianism, held a council meeting at Constantinople. This council reaffirmed the Nicene Creed and officially added the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son to complete the trinity of three uncreated aspects of the one God. The Creed was revised as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into existence, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down from the heavens, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge living and dead, of Whose kingdom there will be no end;

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified, Who spoke through the prophets;

in one holy Catholic and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism to the remission of sins; we look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen

At Constantinople, they also recognized the See of Alexandria as subordinate to the See of Constantinople, which was made a major center for Christianity by Constantine.<sup>13</sup> This council meeting displeased many African Church leaders and helped to further strengthen a nationalistic fervor that always existed among many of the African

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity Vol. I.* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 164. Also, Barbara Watterson. *Coptic Egypt* (Edinburgh, England: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), 42.

Church leaders.<sup>14</sup> It was also at this time that Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.

### **Church Councils Confronting the Nestorian Controversy**

The next stage of the Arian controversy involved Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, and Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria. In 430 C.E. Cyril held a local council in Alexandria to challenge Nestorius' teachings that "the Virgin" Mary was the *Christotokos* (Christ-bearing or Mother of Christ), conflicting with a more popular belief in Mary as the *Theotokos* (God-bearing or Mother of God).

A general council of all church bishops was called in 431 C.E. by Emperor Theodosius II and held in Ephesus. Cyril had the support of the Bishops of African sees and Ephesus. Supporters of Nestorius arrived several days late. The supporters of Cyril seized this opportunity to condemn Nestorianism and depose Nestorius. When supporters of Nestorius arrived, they protested the council's decision. The matter was presented to the Emperor, who temporarily deposed Cyril and Nestorius.

It was decided through the Union of 433 C.E., with the intervention of Bishop Acacius of Beroea, that Jesus was "true God and true man, consisting of a reasonable soul and a body."<sup>15</sup> Nestorius remained exiled in Egypt until his death in 444 C.E. In 449 C.E. a monk named Eutyches from Constantinople challenged the decision reached in 433. He denounced the decision as Nestorianism. In 449 Theodosius II called the bishops to a council meeting in Ephesus. Eutyches taught that before the union (incarnation),

<sup>14</sup> Anyike, *Historical Christianity African Centered*, 130.

<sup>15</sup> Latourette, *A History of Christianity Vol. I.*, 168.

there were two natures, divine and human. These natures became one, after the union. Eutyches was opposed by Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople, and supported by Dioscurus, Bishop of Alexandria. The council upheld the opinion of Eutyches. Dioscurus, who presided over the council, excommunicated the Bishops of Rome, Antioch and Constantinople. The losers in this conflict called the meeting the “Robber Council.” However, this victory was short lived.

In 451 C.E. Marcian, the successor to Theodosius II, called the bishops to another council meeting in Chalcedon. This meeting was the last major council of the church before the split. This council concluded that the son was perfect in “Godhead” and perfect in “manhood,” truly God and truly man. This acknowledgement of two natures is called the Diphysite view. The council further concluded that the Son and Father were of the same substance (*homoousion*); that the son was without sin and the only-begotten of the Father; and that the Virgin was the Mother of God (*Theotokos*).<sup>16</sup>

Eutyches was denounced as a heretic and Dioscurus was deposed and excommunicated. This council also established a church hierarchy, recognizing Rome as the superior see and Constantinople as the second in authority.

The decisions reached at Chalcedon produced a fatal split between the eastern sees of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, from the western sees of Rome and Constantinople. Throughout the next 200 years, the Egyptian church developed its own independent structure separate from the politically enforced “Catholic” church. The term “Coptic” is popularly used to distinguish this branch of Christianity. “Coptic” or “Copt” is derived

<sup>16</sup> Russell E. Aldwinckle, *More Than Man: A Study in Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 36-37.

from the Greek *Aiguptious*, a word used to identify the Egyptians, separate from the Greeks and other nationalities living in Egypt.

The Coptic Church maintained a Monophysite view, recognizing the Father and Son as one nature. The Monophysite doctrine had some supporters from time to time in other parts of the Christian world, but it was recognized as a belief consistent with Egyptian nationalism. Those few Egyptians who were Diphysites were regarded as *Melkites* or the king's Christians. They composed the membership of the Orthodox Church in Egypt. The majority of Egyptian Christians belonged to the Coptic Church.<sup>17</sup>

Attempts to suppress the Coptic Church continued from 451 C.E. until the rise of Islam in 642. Islam presented a serious challenge to Coptic Christianity. Many Copts accepted Islam, while others were forced south into Ethiopia. Athanasius appointed Frumentarius, a Syrian, as the first bishop of the church in Ethiopia in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. This church provided a place of refuge for Coptic Christians.

### **The Canonicalization of Scriptures by Synods and Councils in North Africa**

In 393 C.E. the Synod of Hippo was held. Hippo was in northwest Africa along the Mediterranean Sea, and is now where Algeria (the northern coast) is today. There are no historical records remaining from this meeting. However, the decisions of that meeting were recorded in the documents remaining from the Synod of Carthage (also in North Africa) held in 397 C.E. The significance of the meeting in 393 C.E. is that it was there that the leaders approved a listing of canonical scriptures that remains the same to this

<sup>17</sup> Anyike, *Historical Christianity African Centered*, 132.

very day for most of the branches of Christianity throughout the world. The approved biblical texts were listed accordingly:

It was also determined that besides the Canonical Scriptures nothing be read in the Church under the title of divine Scriptures. The Canonical Scriptures are these: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua the son of Nun, Judges, Ruth, four books of Kings, two books of Paraleipomena, Job, the Psalter, five books of Solomon, the books of the twelve prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel, Daniel, Tobit, Judith, Esther, two books of Esdras, two books of the Maccabees. Of the New Testament: four books of the Gospels, one book of the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of the Apostle Paul, one epistle of the same [writer] to the Hebrews, two Epistles of the Apostle Peter, three of John, one of James, one of Jude, one book of the Apocalypse of John.<sup>18</sup>

Determining which books were valid was a matter that greatly concerned the Church. The 27 New Testament books were first listed in today's familiar order (Matthew to Revelation) by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in 367 C.E.

Between 375 and 395 C.E., the New Testament books were translated into the Coptic language (common in Egypt) by Egyptian monks. This language was developed by transliterating Egyptian sounds into the Greek alphabet and by adding seven Egyptian alphabets for sounds not represented by Greek letters. The Coptic translations of the New Testament were written specifically for the large Egyptian Christian population. The colloquial form of this translation made the New Testament accessible to the Egyptian masses that did not read Koine (Greek).

It is interesting to note the translators chose the word *Nute* to identify God. *Nute* is the Coptic form of *Netcherw*. The *Netcherw*, from which the word *nature* is derived, represents the many aspects of the one Supreme God in Egyptian Cosmogony.<sup>19</sup> The

<sup>18</sup> Bible Research, "Third Council of Carthage (A.D. 387)," accessed September 10, 2018, <http://www.bible-researcher.com/carthage.html>.

ancient African concept of God having many aspects (or being diffused), is still the prevailing African concept of God (in a monotheistic context). From the traditional African perspective, the idea of God being alone is unacceptable, because to be alone is to be cursed.<sup>20</sup>

Scriptural manuscripts were widely distributed and discussed among early Christians in North Africa. Aside from the manuscripts destroyed during times of persecution, millions of Greek, Coptic and Arabic papyrus documents were destroyed by excavations of Egypt.<sup>21</sup> Despite the destruction of scriptural and other Christian literature from Africa, many important documents have survived.

The three oldest existing biblical manuscripts are the *Vatican Manuscript*, named so because it is kept at the Vatican; the *Sinaitic Manuscript*, which was originally found in a monastery on Mt Sinai; and the *Alexandrian Manuscript*, which was written in Alexandria.<sup>22</sup> British scholars B.F. Westcott and F.H. Hort developed a system to classify all biblical manuscripts. Four families of classification are produced from this system. They are the *Western Text*, the *Alexandrian Text*, the *Neutral Text* and the *Koine or Byzantine Text*. The manuscripts of the Alexandrian Text family (also called the

<sup>19</sup> Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 75, 250-251. Also Kamil, *Coptic Egypt History and Guide*, 46-47.

<sup>20</sup> A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1998), 20-21. Also, E. Bolaji Idowu, *Oludumare: God in Yoruba Beliefs* (New York, NY: Wazobia, 1994), 204.

<sup>21</sup> Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goering, Editors, *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 44.

<sup>22</sup> Neil R. Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1963), 30-34.

Egyptian Text-Type) are the oldest of biblical manuscripts in existence. They date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century C.E. to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century C.E.

The Vatican Manuscript (classified as Codex Vaticanus or Codex B), the Sinaitic Manuscript (classified as Codex Sinaiticus or Codex Aleph) and the Alexandrian Manuscript (classified as Codex Alexandrinus or Codex A) are all categorized into the Alexandrian Text family. Manuscripts classified in the Alexandrian Text family were widely quoted by such Alexandrian church fathers as Clement, Origen and Cyril. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the popular use of these types of manuscripts among African church leaders indicates that they originated in Alexandria.<sup>23</sup>

Considering the prominent role that the African Church played in translating and preserving biblical texts, it's not surprising that they would prioritize identifying which texts were proper for canonicalization. The decisions made at the Synod of Hippo and reaffirmed at the Synod of Carthage in 397 C.E., were also ratified by the Church at Rome in 418 C.E. by Pope Boniface I.<sup>24</sup>

### **Shared Values for World Christianity**

For over 2000 years, Christianity has endured. From its earliest stages until the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, Christianity was in its primitive years. It was during this time that the Church was born, nursed and carefully shaped. The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries were the formative years of the Church. It is when the Church learned to speak, walk and have some sense of identity.

<sup>23</sup> Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, 17-18.

<sup>24</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford, England: Macmillan 1881), 440, 541-2.

It is this sense of identity that is represented by the shared values of the Church. The Church had to develop a self-identity separate from Judaism. It had to understand how its body was made, and how it functioned. It had to develop a clearer Christology, and soteriology. It had to determine what was true and what was heretical. It had to clearly state what was canon and what was not canon.

By developing shared values regarding these matters, the Church firmly established its solid foundation. They were able to do this by embracing, shaping and defending the fundamental core value that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. Based on a shared respect for the words and works of the Apostles, they established and formulated polities, and processes for the canonicalization of scriptures. They held meetings (synods and councils) and adhered to a shared respect for a democratic process in order to make important decisions.

By no means were their efforts accomplished with ease. It was not easy to develop trust in the government that earlier persecuted them. It was uncomfortable for the Church to move from being the rejected religion of the Roman Empire, to become the state religion. It was difficult to sort through theological positions, and to not only reject certain ideologies, but to reject the individuals who sincerely held to those ideas. It was challenging to sort through the political or nationalistic motives that were presented as God inspired. It was increasingly difficult to be the universal Church when there were obvious and irreparable fissures developing throughout the foundation of the Church.

Despite the splitting of the Church that took place after the Council of Chalcedon, the various branches of Christianity maintained certain fundamental values. They all embraced shared values based on the Creed developed at Nicaea in 325 C.E.

### The Creed of Faith for the Coptic Orthodox Church

We believe in one God, God the Father the Pantocrator who created heaven and earth, and all things seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not created, of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy spirit and the Virgin Mary and became Man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried. And on the third day He rose from the dead, according to the scriptures, ascended to the heavens; He sits at the right hand of his Father, and He is coming again in His glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end.

Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Life-Giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And in one holy, catholic and apostolic church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the coming age. Amen.<sup>25</sup>

### The Nicene Creed of the Orthodox Church

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of light; true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried. And the third day He arose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; Whose Kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets.

<sup>25</sup> St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church, "The Orthodox Creed," accessed September 10, 2018, <http://www.stmarkboston.org/about-the-coptic-orthodox-church/orthodox-creed/>

In one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.<sup>26</sup>

### The Catholic Nicene Creed of the Roman Catholic Church

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.<sup>27</sup>

Though these branches of Christianity have had many contentious, and sometimes violent clashes, they remain inextricably linked through the sharing of these creeds.

### Conclusion

There is power in shared values. Just as the Early Church developed processes to reach agreement on shared values, so can the latter Church. The challenges and troubles of this present age are many. The world is separated according to religion, race, politics, class, age, gender, gender orientation, nationality, language, tribe and philosophy. Aside

<sup>26</sup> St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, “The Symbol of Faith of Orthodox Christians,” accessed September 10, 2018, <http://www.orthodox.net/services/symbol-es.html>.

<sup>27</sup> BeginningCatholic.com, “The Catholic Nicene Creed,” accessed September 10, 2018, <http://www.beginningcatholic.com/catholic-nicene-creed>.

from the fundamental things that make us human (i.e., verbal language, higher intelligence, opposable thumbs, etc.), our most valuable characteristic is our ability to make faith-based choices for complex long-term benefit. The Early Church made decisions in their day in anticipation of the “world” or “age” to come.

The Church has taken its eyes off things to come, in return for things to keep. It is trying to keep its members, its property, its traditions and its sanctity. Far too often, it looks toward what is behind it, rather than what is ahead of it. The Church has firm theologies, Christologies, and soteriologies, but it does not offer clear eschatologies.

The present and future Church must reclaim its role as the place where shared values are developed and accepted. These values must reflect a hermeneutics that is relevant, contemporary, global, and yet based on the creeds that have sustained the Church. These values must transcend many of the boundaries that separate the world today. The Early Church could not have anticipated what the future would bring as a result of their efforts. The present Church can be more intentional about taking into consideration the experiences of our past, challenges of our times, and the potential of our unified efforts in aiding or producing transformative movements in preparation for the world to come.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### INTRODUCTION

These are truly interesting times to be alive. The world is at its technological best, yet at its moral worst. There are senseless wars that have been initiated based on lies told by trusted political leaders. The institution of marriage is suffering a high divorce rate, or it is considered unnecessary by couples who see no value in it. There is a high level of violence in some urban communities, where children and elders are caught in the crossfire. There is a drug epidemic where a life is destroyed as soon as someone takes one “hit” of the most potent drugs known to man. The young and the old are exposed to pornographic medias like never before, and their perspectives on sexuality have been perverted. The words of a popular song from the 1970s, sung by the Temptations, appropriately sums the world with the words “The only person talking about love thy brother is the preacher, and it seems nobody's interested in learning but the teacher. Segregation, determination, demonstration, integration, aggravation, humiliation, obligation to our nation – Ball of confusion! Oh yeah, that's what the world is today.”

In many ways, the world is struggling to balance its selfishness with its love. Perhaps the prophetic words of Jesus (recorded in Matthew 24:12) are being fulfilled, where he said that at the end of the age “...because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.”

It's quite interesting that Jesus connects lawlessness and the loss of love in this way. Lawlessness is a form of selfishness. It is the selfish who choose to love only themselves to the degree that they will violate the lives and property of others for their own satisfaction. But, love turned inside-out ceases to be love. It is extreme lawlessness to shatter love's striving for connection to others, and to turn it inside-out to one's self. This is the condition of many in the world today.

All lawlessness is not extreme, sometimes it is subtle. Sometimes it is well dressed in promising phrases, and pretty spiritual affirmations. But the result is always the same – selfishness that leads to a lack or loss of love and unity.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Paul shares insights on love's doings in the midst of religious endeavors. His words are a response to various problems that developed within the Corinthian church. Paul sought to develop a sense of law and order within the church with love as the foundation for shared values. It was the development of conflicting values that posed a serious threat to the church at Corinth.

Several Greek terms in the New Testament are translated as “love.” They are ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*), φιλέω (*phileō*), and ἀγάπη (*agape*).

The term *agapao* is a verb, and it means to love someone or something. It is this kind of love that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 2:9, where he writes “But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.’”

The term *philaō* is a verb, and it means to love someone affectionately or kindly, or to be very friendly with someone. This is the love Paul speaks of in 1

Corinthians 16:22a, where he writes “Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord.”

The term *agape* is a noun, and it means affection or benevolence, charity, and a love-feast. It is the term Paul uses throughout 1 Corinthians 13. It’s commonly defined as unconditional love, or love that is given with no expectation of receiving something in return. Paul’s description of love in chapter 13 presents it as having identity and personality that are alive. Love is brought to life in such a way that it falls just short of anthropomorphism. It makes sense that this would be the case, because it is embodied in the life of Christ, and it is to continue its human form through those of the Church who live it.

This writing is presented to explore the theological depth and value of *agape*-love as a foundation for developing shared values that can be practically embraced and implemented. The purpose for developing this system is the same as that of Paul’s, in his concern for the church at Corinth, that our efforts be rooted in love so that we live our deepest meaning.

Herein, the theological ramifications of Paul’s writings on love will be explored in comparison and contrast to other theological perspectives on love. The other perspectives to be shared are those of Augustine of Hippo, Paul Tillich and Martin Luther King Jr.

Special attention will be given to *agape*, in harmony with *agapao*, *phileo* and *eros*. The term *eros* is not used in the Bible. *Eros* is the Greek term used to describe erotic or sensual love. This love (*eros*) is represented in the Song of Songs, and also referred to by the Theologians whose reflections will be shared later. This examination

will lead to the introduction of Systematic Agapism as a theological approach to developing or healing broken relationship through shared values in the Black community.

### **Love as the Foundation**

It's strange, that though one has the same tongue in their mouth that they were born with, in old age they will accidentally bite it sometimes. It would seem, that after many years, one would have developed perfect tongue and teeth coordination. Similarly, it is this same lack of coordination between love and loving that motivated this poem:

I have loved REAL and let love go,  
 Thinking I was losing when I was winning,  
 Thinking I could find a new beginning.  
 But for real, I was only left spinning  
 Out of control with nowhere to go.

Why can't love come with clear signs?  
 Signs like the signals that let us know to go on green,  
 to cautiously keep going on yellow,  
 and you must stop on red, or you might end up dead.  
 Death due to failure to heed love's clear warning signs.

But, what dies when love says "GO," and we don't?  
 Does this love sentenced to death live or die?  
 Or does it take the form of the walking dead, a zombie head?  
 It walks the earth, but it has no heart.  
 It spreads death, but no kiss to impart.  
 Out of control until someone delivers a death-blow to the head,  
 Never to rise again, unless its resurrection is truly love led.

We say we "fall in love!"  
 But in reality, love only seeks to fall in us.  
 Love plants its seeds and we determine if they will grow.  
 We determine if love will sprout from our hearts  
 and be presented as a bouquet of life to our beloved.

Then, and only then, can these feelings really mean that love is in our hearts, and we are in it seen.<sup>1</sup>

For so many years, theologians and philosophers have explored and expounded on ontological questions. Humanity has thoroughly explored who we are genetically, who we are spiritually, who we are romantically, who we are culturally, and who we are at the core of our soul. Yet, humanity is still far from figuring it all out. But we do believe that at the core of our being is this thing we call “love.”

The problem is, the deeper our individual understanding and appreciation of love goes, the further we feel we are from comprehending it. Because of the rise in self-isolation and selfishness, love is more elusive than it’s ever been. In many ways, we love throughout our lives. Many of us love our families deeply. When we are young, we may experience “puppy love” for a first “girlfriend” or “boyfriend.” As we grow older, we may grow deeper love for intimate partners, close friends, church members, and our children. We may also grow deeply in love with God.

Despite all of this loving, we still struggle to balance our love and our actions toward those who we love. Just as we sometimes fail to maintain good tongue and teeth coordination, we may also fail to maintain good love (as a noun), and love (as a verb) coordination. We still struggle to hear love, follow love, show love, and understand love.

<sup>1</sup> Anyike, James C. “Love’s Signs Seen.” November, 2017.

### The Theological and Eschatological Depth of Love

The final pericope (verses 8 thru 13) of 1 Corinthians 13 begins with the words “Love never ends.” Until this point, love has been revealed as that which gives meaning and value to the gifts present in the Corinthian church. It was then given full identity by way of the qualities shared in the text. And now, love is being revealed as the conduit for moving from *chronos* to *kairos*.

The ancient Greeks had two terms to describe time. There is *chronos* (χρόνος) which refers to the chronological or linear timeframe we live in from minute to minute. Then there is *kairos* (καιρός) which refers to the fulfillment of, or opportune time for completion. In chapter 7, verse 39, Paul instructs that a wife is bound to her husband until his time (*chronos*) ends. Yet, In chapter 4, verse 5, he instructs to not “pronounce judgment before the time (*kairos*), before the Lord comes,...” Comparatively, *chronos* is what happens as the clock “tics” and “tocks” from seconds, to minutes, to hours, and to days; while *kairos* is what happens as one blows air into a large balloon, and it finally reaches the time when it can take no more and bursts.

The transitions in the whole text are past-present from verse 1 to 3, with the present from verse 4 to 7, and present-future from verse 8 to 13. The emergence of love as eternal completes its construction. Paul leaves no doubt about what he is saying by specifically stating that prophesies, tongues and knowledge (those things in *kronos*) will come to an end, because they are based in the past and present limitations of human finity and foolishness. But love, since its identity is not subject to the same frame of time or comprehensive disability that the believers are subject to, it exists as it is fully in the present and future. Love is the fulfillment of the eschatological expectations of the

scriptures, and the foundation for the believer's eternity with God. Through love, the limits of our partial prophetic and epistemological insights will be removed, and we will know all that there is to know. This is the putting away of "childish ways" that Paul refers to in verse 11.

In verse 12 he writes "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face." Present-day readers of the text may fail to appreciate the "mirror" reference. At the time that Paul wrote this letter, mirrors were primarily made of a well-polished metal. The image it produced was not nearly as clear as the modern mirror, which was not developed until the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>2</sup>

When we are spiritually matured, we will see God "face to face." This too would have been quite exciting for the believers in the early Church. It was still believed that if one saw the face of God, they would die (according to Exodus 33:20). But in the right time, Paul reveals, we will see and know God, as God sees and knows us.

The chapter is concluded with the words "And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." These final words are the final punctuation of this presentation on love. It is one final affirmation that those things that speak to our present aspirations—faith and hope—are undergirded and empowered by something greater, love.

### **Reflections on Love by Various Theologians**

In addition to the very rich expressions of love shared in the text, various theologians have contributed greatly to our understanding of love. The theologians to be

<sup>2</sup> "History of Mirrors – Mirrors of the Ancient World." accessed on April 30, 2018, <http://www.mirrorhistory.com/mirror-history/history-of-mirrors/>

shared here are Augustine of Hippo, Paul Tillich and Martin Luther King, Jr. Their insights will provide greater appreciation for the scriptural text, and foundation for the development of a shared value system based on love.

Augustine of Hippo (354 to 430) – His full name is Aurelius Augustinus. He is regarded as the greatest of the Fathers of the Church, and served as the Bishop of Hippo in Africa. There are two aspects of love that come from Augustine that will help us. The first is from *The Confessions*, Book 10, Chapter 6:

Not with uncertain, but with assured consciousness do I love You, O Lord. You have stricken my heart with Your word, and I loved You. And also the heaven, and earth, and all that is therein, behold, on every side they say that I should love You; nor do they cease to speak unto all, so that they are without excuse.<sup>3</sup>

In this prayer, Augustine affirms his deep love for God in a way that conveys the pervasive nature of love. Not only is his love shared between God and he, but also all throughout nature. Not only does nature reveal God's love to the believer, but it does not cease to "speak unto all," so that no one has an excuse for not hearing the call to love.

In Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, Book 1, Chapter 26, he focuses on how loving God and neighbor as self, includes loving self without the explicit command to do so. He also points out that since all of nature is from and in God, love is thereby shared all throughout creation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "The Confessions of St. Augustine - (Book 10)," New Advent, accessed April 30, 2018 at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110110.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine of Hippo. *On Christian Doctrine, In Four Books*. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, pg. 17., accessed at <http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Augustine%20doctrine.pdf> on April 30, 2018.

Augustine's perspectives on love present it as touching all things and all beings. However, it takes the Holy Spirit to fully activate it within the believer. In *The Confessions*, Book 13, Chapter 7, Augustine describes the work of the Spirit as driving away our uncleanness, and raising us up, through love, to be at peace in God. It is this work done by the Spirit which prepares us to love God as we are loved.<sup>5</sup>

In *St. Augustine's Writings Against the Manichaeans and Against the Donatist*, Chapter 15, Paragraph 25, Augustine identifies four virtues of love to be extended to God, as the one loved. They are temperance, that is giving self totally to the loved; fortitude, that is bearing all things for the loved; justice, that is serving only the loved, and ruling and leading rightly because of it; and prudence, that is to intelligently distinguish between what will, or will not help in loving the loved. According to Augustine, these are the virtues that lead to a happy life.<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 26, Paragraph 51, he points out that love of God is the beginning of learning to love, and loving one's neighbor is the first step in perfecting one's love.<sup>7</sup>

In defining the terms for love, in *City of God*, Book 14, Chapter 7, he refers to the Latin words *diligis*, *amo*, *dilectio*, *amor*, and *caritas*. *Diligis* is to hold in high regard. *Amor* is to like or love in the higher or lower sense. *Dilectio* is to love as a delight with

<sup>5</sup> Augustine of Hippo. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Translated by Edward J. Pusey, Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999, pg.185. Accessed on April 30, 2018 at [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0354-0430,\\_Augustinus,\\_Confessionum\\_Libri\\_Tredecim-Pusey\\_Translation,\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0354-0430,_Augustinus,_Confessionum_Libri_Tredecim-Pusey_Translation,_EN.pdf). Also see Mark Ellingsen. *The Richness of Augustine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), pp. 53.,86.

<sup>6</sup> G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (New York, NY: Cambridge, 1982), 150-151.

<sup>7</sup> J. Philip Wogaman and Douglas M. Strong, Editors. *Readings in Christian Ethics*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 62-64. Also, Kent Millard, *The Gratitude Path: Leading Your Church to Generosity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 37.

pleasure and goodwill. *Amor* is to love with affection or passion, and is often associated with sexual passions. *Caritas* is to give love or charity. Augustine equates *diligis* with the Greek *agapao* as used in John 21:15. He equates *amo* with the Greek *phileo*. *Dilectio* and *caritas* are equated with *agape*. *Amor* is equated with *eros*. According to Augustine, “the Scriptures of our religion, whose authority we prefer to all writings whatsoever, make no distinction between *amor*, *dilectio*, and *caritas*:...”<sup>8</sup> In this sense, love involves all of these as shared between the loved and those who love.

Augustine believed that God is love, and love is God, based on 1 John 4:8. He describes how love goes in a circular movement from God, to and through the beloved, to the neighbor and God, in never ending patterns.<sup>9</sup> This bears witness to Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13:8, “Love never ends.”

Paul Tillich (1886 - 1965) – Tillich was born in Germany of Prussian lineage. He served as a chaplain in the German Army during World War I. Because he was opposed to the Nazi politics of Adolf Hitler, he left Germany in 1933 and came to the United States where he joined the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Before leaving Germany, he had already served on the faculties of five German universities teaching philosophy and theology.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Philip Schaff, editor. *St. Augustine’s City of God and Christian Doctrine*. (New York, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890), accessed on May 1, 2018 at [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1819-1893,\\_Schaff,\\_Philip,\\_2\\_Vol\\_02\\_The\\_City\\_Of\\_God.\\_Christian Doctrine,\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1819-1893,_Schaff,_Philip,_2_Vol_02_The_City_Of_God._Christian Doctrine,_EN.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> J.C. Pilkington, Translator, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Cleveland, OH: Fine Editions Press, 1876), 54.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette. *A History of Christianity Volume II: A.D. 1500 – A.D. 1975*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row Publishing, 1975), pp. 1384-1385.

Tillich offers a very complex systematic theology which acknowledges that there are some things we cannot truly know. Using his “method of correlation,” he identifies the unknowable in light of the gospel’s response to it.<sup>11</sup> According to Tillich, we cannot know God empirically. However, he affirms the use of religious symbols to express what we cannot know. Within this system of symbols, God, on the transcendent level, is “the ground of being,” and “the highest being in which everything we have does exist in the most perfect way.”<sup>12</sup> One of the attributes of God on the transcendent level is that God is love.<sup>13</sup>

Also, within this system of symbols is God (and the Kingdom of God) as immanent, which is the appearance of the divine in time and space.<sup>14</sup> These symbols are realized through the incarnation of the divine (as with Jesus the Christ), the sacraments (i.e., holy communion and baptism), and various articles of the church (e.g., candles, the cross, holy oil, etc.). Since the symbols (or names) and our encounters with God (referred to as theism) are flawed, absolute faith is necessary in order to have an authentic God experience where one is “grasped” by the “God (who is), beyond God (who we name).” Absolute faith is “the power of being-itself,” which gives us “the courage to be.” Without the courage to be, we are merely “human.”

<sup>11</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume II* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2010), 480.

<sup>12</sup> William I. Rowe and William J. Wainwright, Editors., *Philosophy of Religion Selected Readings*, (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1973), 484-485.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology Volume Two*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 46-47.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology Volume Three*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 359-361.

The connection between the human and the ground of being involves many “moving parts” in Tillich’s overall systems. It may be an over-simplification by saying that the human has a spirit which can experience revelation, which can reason, and which can love. In the human spirit’s effort to resolve the conflict between absolutism (of the divine) and relativism (of the human), Tillich believed that love was the only way to fully overcome.

Tillich argues that “the paradox of final revelation, overcoming the conflict between absolutism and relativism, is love. The love of Jesus as the Christ, which is the manifestation of the divine love—and only this—embraces everything concrete in self and world.”<sup>15</sup>

This brings us back to 1 Corinthians 13, because the term that Tillich equates with divine love is *agape*. *Agape*, unlike other types of love (i.e., *phileo* and *eros*), is universal. Tillich writes “No one with whom a concrete relation is technically possible (“the neighbor”) is excluded; nor is anyone preferred. *Agape* accepts the other in spite of resistance. It suffers and forgives. It seeks the personal fulfillment of the other.”<sup>16</sup>

Tillich’s system, like that of Paul and Augustine, involve circular movement between those who love and the loved. And these systems also involve eschatological fulfillment of love. For Paul, God is love; love has qualities that empower and lead to transformation from the perishable to the imperishable; and then love is fulfilled in time (*kairos*) with the full uniting of God/love and the loved. For Augustine, God is love; love

<sup>15</sup> Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology Volume One*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), pg. 152.

<sup>16</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume One*, pg. 280.

is God; loving God and loving neighbor as self, includes self-love; love for God is expressed through all that God loved enough to create; and love's ultimate aim is to reach perfection.

Let us not forget that the recipient of Love in Jesus' parable is an injured Jewish man being served by a Samaritan. The nationalistic and religious tensions in the story are neutralized by the love shown by the Samaritan. Walter Arthur McCray sheds light on this point, and further argues that self-love is a necessary part of loving our neighbor. Accordingly, it was the love that the Samaritan brought to the encounter with the injured man that compelled him to act.<sup>17</sup>

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929 to 1968) – At birth he was given the name Michael King, Jr. At the age of five his father changed his, and the name of his son, to Martin Luther King. His father did it out of respect for the 16<sup>th</sup> Century reformer, Martin Luther. The young King's high intellect is reflected in the fact that he began college at age fifteen. He was ordained as a Baptist minister at eighteen, and earned a Ph.D. degree at twenty-six.

He became a major public figure in 1956 as the leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which led to the desegregation of public buses in that town. In 1957 King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. From the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, he led and participated in many efforts to gain civil rights for black people in America. King developed a philosophy of non-violent social change. At the foundation of his philosophy was the belief in the transformative power of love.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Arthur McCray, *Pro-Black, Pro-Christ, Pro-Cross: African-Descended Evangelical Identity* (Chicago, IL: Black Light Fellowship, 2012), 254-255.

The numerous boycotts, sit-ins, marches, protests, voter registration drives and other non-violent efforts he led, were met with deadly violence. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, 40 people were killed (37 blacks and 3 whites) for their efforts to advance civil rights.<sup>18</sup> The numbers of those injured physically and economically probably ranges in the thousands.

King was sometimes questioned by church leaders about the importance of Civil Rights to the evangelistic work of the Church? To King it was all too clear. He said “Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men and is not concerned with the slums that doom them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them, is a dry-as-dust religion.”<sup>19</sup> King’s non-violent approach was viewed critically (and often negatively) in contrast to the more “militant” ideologies of the Black Panther Party and Nation of Islam. These organizations, that were primarily based in the urban areas of northern America, advocated self-defense that called for meeting violence with violence. They were at the forefront of the Black Power Movement of the 1960s. Though King disagreed with their call for separating the races, he did agree with their call for Black empowerment. According to Dr. Mark Ellingsen, King believed “that the next stage of the Civil Rights Movement must be for ‘Negroes’ to learn how to grasp power, including the exercise of economic power, in order to influence the course.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center website, “Civil Rights Martyrs” accessed on May 1, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/what-we-do/civil-rights-memorial/civil-rights-martyrs>.

<sup>19</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 113.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Ellingsen, *Reclaiming Our Roots* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 361.

In 1963 King wrote and published *The Strength to Love*.<sup>21</sup> In this text, King presents God as a God of justice, but also as a God of love and mercy. He argues that the Kingdom of God is his “kingdom of love,” which the believers are citizens of. As citizens, when we act in any way that does not conform to the love ethic of Jesus, we show our ugliness by conforming to the world and its standards.

King references Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, a well-known early 20<sup>th</sup> Century liberal minister, who preached about the contrast between “enforceable” and “nonenforceable” obligations. King described the difference by writing “No code of conduct ever persuaded a father to love his children or a husband to show affection to his wife. The law court may force him to provide bread for the family, but it cannot make him provide the bread of love.” Love cannot be legislated, it must be activated. One must choose to love (*agapao*).<sup>22</sup>

King’s teachings on love took on a challenging practicability when he identified the qualities that love requires. They are forgiveness, to not fully judge an “enemy-neighbor” by their evil deeds, and to not seek to defeat an enemy, but to win his friendship. In light of the profound racial, political, cultural and international turbulence that defined the 1960s in America, these love qualities were seen as ridiculous by many. Yet, King lived it consistently. Throughout his time at the forefront of the movement, he was stabbed, beaten, jailed, threatened, and cursed daily. And then he was killed. Despite

<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Strength to Love*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1963).

<sup>22</sup> King, *The Strength to Love*, 37.

the many difficult and dangerous challenges, he remained faithful to his citizenship in the kingdom of love.<sup>23</sup>

It was King's ultimate hope that a love movement would overcome hate's stronghold to create the "beloved community." It would be a community where humanity lived in harmony with one another, and free of oppression.

Like Augustine and Tillich, King uses three Greek concepts for love (*eros*, *philia*, and *agape*) to better define love as he means it. He says that it is not to be confused with "some sentimental outpouring" or "emotional bosh," but something much deeper. He defines *eros* as "a sort of aesthetic or romantic love." He adds that, in the Platonic dialogues it is described as "a yearning of the soul for the realm of the divine."<sup>24</sup> *Philia* is defined as "a reciprocal love and the intimate affection and friendship between friends." *Agape* is defined as "the love of God operating in the human heart." Like Tillich who sees love as universal, King shows love to be based on who or what God loves, and not on what the human likes or loves. Accordingly, King explains that when Jesus calls us to love our enemies, "he is speaking of *agape*, understanding and creative, redemptive goodwill for all men."<sup>25</sup>

## The Conclusion

Paul, Augustine, Tillich and King shared in common the challenges of facing serious threats to humanity's love (*phileo* and *agapao*) potential. These threats came in

<sup>23</sup> King, *The Strength to Love*, 50-51.

<sup>24</sup> Hans Kung, *Being A Christian* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 261-262.

<sup>25</sup> King, *The Strength to Love*, 52.

the form of elitism as represented by “the strong,” in Paul’s ministry to the church at Corinth; the form of bad religion as in the case of Augustine’s dealings with the Manichaeans and Donatists; the form of bad political leadership, like that of Nazism faced by Tillich in Germany; and the form of racial hatred and injustices, like the many manifestation of white supremacy confronted by King.

The sad, and honest, truth is that love (*agape*) has not eliminated any of these threats from the world. It would be so wonderful if history recorded that love won in Corinth to the point that Paul’s call to love convicted the hearts of the believers and they purged themselves of false teachings, immorality, division and egotism. However, the truth is Paul’s relationship with the church at Corinth deteriorated, and eventually the church did too.<sup>26</sup> It would be great to have the examples of love transforming the early Church in such a way that the Donatists, Manichaeans and others who believed differently found common agreement and community. Yet, they held to their various ideologies and theologies, and missed the chance to unify. It would have been exciting if Tillich, Bonhoeffer and other theologians in Germany would have led a love revolution that would have put down the hate movement of Hitler. However, Tillich went into exile, Bonhoeffer was imprisoned, and Hitler’s Germany was defeated along with their Axis allies. How beautiful it would be if Dr. King’s philosophy would have grown and overcome hatred to the point that, with love and faith, we would have been able “to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.”<sup>27</sup> But instead, America’s “melting pot” is boiling over, and racial tensions

<sup>26</sup> Fathers of the Church, “Letter to the Corinthians (Clement),” New Advent, accessed December 14, 2019, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1010.htm>

are higher than ever. Yet, it must still be declared that love has not failed, because love has not finished. Love consistently rises through our individual and collective acts of patience, kindness, selflessness, truth, hope, and high expectations for a better world.

Despite the many challenges the world faces, in general, and the Black community faces, in particular, it's never too late for a love movement. If the Black community in America is to survive and thrive, a love movement is necessary.

The sociotheological term chosen for this love movement is *Systematic Agapism*. Systematic Agapism is a term specifically conceived for this project. Agapism is the belief in an unselfish agape love. It is love that has and is a power onto itself. It is love that is transformative and transcendent. It is the love that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 13, that is patient, kind, is not envious, is not boastful, is not rude, it does not have to have its own way, and it is eternal.

Whereas, agapism represents a general commitment to agape love, systematic agapism is a specific form of agape love that takes into consideration the unique history, needs and aspirations of those to be recipients of this love. In this case, the system is being developed to serve as the foundation for shared values for the Black community with intent to facilitate the development, maintenance and success of relationships within healthy families, churches and communities.

<sup>27</sup> From Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington on August 23, 1963.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose for this paper is to examine contemporary ideas relevant to systematic agapism as the foundation for establishing shared values within the Black community. *Systematic Agapism* is a sociotheological term conceived for this project. In general, it is an expansion of agapism, as a general concept, into a uniquely designed way of loving. In this case it is presented with consideration to Black perspectives on cultural influences, community development and racial advancement. Explanations will be given as to why systematic agapism is the best foundation for establishing practical and meaningful shared values for the Black community.

The primary discipline to be examined, as it relates to ministerial practice, is the manifestation of ecclesiastical agapism. The primary disciplines to be examined, as it relates to scientific practices, are the sociological, anthropological and cultural manifestations of being in community. The need for shared values for the Black community will be carefully explored. This exploration will take into consideration past and present factors (some negative and some positive) that can impede or enhance our potential for developing or healing relationships.

Though the goal of the project is to develop shared value, the hope is that these values will lead to meaningful commitments within our homes, churches, communities

and other institutions, to heal broken relationships, and/or establish new ones with the right foundations.

### **The Theoretical Foundation in Scientific Practices**

#### *The Anthropological Manifestations of Being in Community*

The words of English poet John Donne, though of a different culture and time, certainly apply to this context:

No man is an island entire of itself; every man  
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;  
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe  
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as  
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine  
own were; any man's death diminishes me,  
because I am involved in mankind.

And therefore never send to know for whom  
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., while speaking at the 1963 March on Washington, shared a similar theme when he said “In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an escapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” The world we live in has forgotten that we are here together. We have erected borders, barriers and walls of all kinds to mark our boundaries and declare our unholy disconnection from one another. The fact that all humanity shares a common African heritage, is something that is rarely discussed by those who control mass-medias and educational institutions. If our common human heritage is discussed, it is in hushed-tones or sterile settings where it’s mentioned as an interesting piece of trivia.

<sup>1</sup> John Donne, *The Works of John Donne*, Volume 3, Henry Alford, Editor (London, England: John W. Parker, 1939), 574-575.

Furthermore, we have made ourselves insensitive to those we exert energy to stay separate from. We have learned to assuage our guilt or ignore our responsibilities to the suffering of humanity by simply saying “You’re in my thoughts and prayers.” In general, the white race in America has greatly benefitted from slavery, while the black race has suffered greatly. The suffering continues. Healing has never taken place.

Part of understanding who we must become involves exploring who we are and who we were. We were originally people from the African continent. Most of us (black people in America) were taken from various parts of West Africa. Prior to enslavement, we were connected to our families, tribes and land. When brought to America, our connections were severed through the force of great violence. We suffered rapes, brandings, shackles, starvation, malnutrition, beatings, castrations, amputations, and many other forms of dehumanization.

No thorough psychological or sociological study can ever be done to assess the full impact of enslavement on African people, past or present. The miracle is that we survived. We suffered millions of casualties on the African continent, across the Atlantic Ocean, and throughout the Americas. When slavery was legally abolished in America, the terror didn’t end. When black people legally received citizenship and the right to vote, the terror didn’t end. When black people celebrated the Brown Vs. The Board of Education decision, it didn’t end there. When Civil Rights and Voter’s Rights acts were passed, it didn’t end there. Though some of us are living in better homes, some are well educated, some are world known entertainers and athletes, and some have reached the highest levels of political office, the terror continues.

The one constant through it all, is we are still together as a race, whether we like it or not. It's not because we all want to be together, but because racism in America refuses to let us disengage from each other. During the time that slavery was legal, we were bound by metal chains. After the Civil War, we were bound together by economic and geographic chains. Since the Civil Rights Movement, we have been bound together by psychological chains. We are still chained together, whether we wear a Brioni suit or a prison jump suit. America refuses to see us separate from our race.

We are not only connected as a race due to racism, we are also connected because we share a common heritage and oppression. Throughout our sojourn in America, we have also fought to stay together on our own terms. Despite the deep oppression and abuse we were subject to, we found ways to be in community.

While in slavery, we found ways to communicate from one plantation to another. We found ways to get married and start families, to communicate covertly through songs while working in the fields, to take scraps of food and make meals, and to integrate our African ways into how we worshiped.<sup>2</sup>

After slavery was legally ended, we found ways to start towns and communities. We also found ways to migrate North in order to find better work opportunities. Carol B. Stack, in her book, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Surviving in a Black Community*, describes a very active connection that was maintained between a Black community in a midwestern town, and blacks who migrated to Chicago. Carol Black uses the fictitious names of “Jackson Harbor” and “The Flats,” for the town and black community in that town. The book was published in 1975, and the description she gives of the town (and its

<sup>2</sup> Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 64-66.

connections to Chicago) fits what Gary, Indiana would have been like at that time. She describes a functioning system of kin networking, where the Black community worked cooperatively in sharing resources and caring for one another.<sup>3</sup>

The inclination for black people to gather themselves into some form of community is a consistent pattern that is repeated in various settings. On a predominant White college campus, the black students will gather in a certain section of the cafeteria. On most campuses, they will form an association or organization for themselves. In White denominations of Christian churches, the black members form caucuses or organizations in order to advance their common interest. In legislative bodies on the state and national levels, black legislators form caucuses to amplify their power in order to better represent their constituents. In almost all of these instances, they coalesce around shared values, not skin color. In the more formal settings they will document certain principles and goals to focus their efforts. It is the combination of gathering around shared values, and our shared heritage, that can renew our commitment to community as a people.

### *The Sociological Manifestations of Being in Community*

Over the last forty years (since the mid-1970s), the tendency toward protracted Black organizing has diminished. There are many reasons why this may have happened. It could be due to integration, and the sense that “we have arrived.” During the Civil Rights Movement, the primary goals were for black people to have the right to vote, the right to live where they wanted to, the right to use public accommodations, the right to be

<sup>3</sup> Carol B. Black, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Surviving in a Black Community* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1975).

educated in predominantly White schools, and the right to be hired where they were qualified to work. Legislations signed in the 1960s made many of these goals a reality, especially in urban settings.

In the 1970s, much of the resistance to integration was beginning to die down. As the society shifted from segregation to integration, there were fewer clear goals for black people to organize around.

Another interesting social-shift that took place in the 1970s, was the change in values regarding the leadership in the community. Whereas ministers, educators, business owners, politicians and other black professional were regarded as the leaders in the community before the 70s, the power shifted afterward to pimps, gang leaders and drug dealers. Robert Roderick Johnson, in his book, *Wake Up Black America: We're Sleepwalking Back to Slavery*, provides a narrative regarding this shift. According to Johnson, as many professionals and higher income black people moved out of the community, those who generated their own local economy emerged. They were “in the hood twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.” The children saw them and their “posse, riding through the neighborhood” in their expensive cars. Since these nefarious characters were the ones they seen, they were the ones who became their heroes.<sup>4</sup>

It is also likely that the popularity of *Blaxploitation* (or black exploitation) films in the 70s, contributed to the shift in leadership. Films like *Super Fly*, *Shaft* and *Cleopatra Jones* depicted characters who dressed in unique urban gear, spoke in a “hip” and “jive” dialect, and engaged in very violent acts. The black protagonist, who may be a

<sup>4</sup> Robert Roderick Johnson, *Wake Up Black America: We're Sleepwalking Back to Slavery* (Chicago, IL: RaveJon Incorporated, 2005), 112-117.

drug “pusher” or police officer, would work to defeat the antagonist who was white, or was a black person serving as a surrogate of “the [white] man.” These films often depicted the pimp, drug dealer, gang leader, or black undercover police officer as the hero who came to save the black community from some diabolical scheme hatched by “whitey.”

Almost simultaneously, life began to imitate art. Black people began to dress, “pimp walk” and “jive talk” like the black protagonist in the film, and the pattern has continued since. From the 1970s to the 1980s, disco music and popular black comedians dominated the Black entertainment industry with sex-charged lyrics, and profanity laced monologues. From the 1980s thru the 1990s, gangsta rap, the malt liquor industry, and crack cocaine had a devastating impact on the Black community. At the beginning of the 2000s, many Black communities were empty shells of their past glory.<sup>5</sup>

The dynamics of protesting, from the Civil Rights era to the Black Lives Matter era, have shifted over time. Protesting shifted focus from gaining certain rights, to gaining justice for individual wrongs. Police shootings of unarmed blacks, followed by massive protests has been a recurring event since the early 1900s. However, these types of protests have multiplied greatly over the last fifteen years.

The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States in 2008, was a true “game changer.” It brought about a level of Black unity that had not been seen on a national level since the Civil Rights Movement. Many Americans hoped that it would be a turning point in American society away from racism. Yet, the opposite has occurred.

<sup>5</sup> Ebony A. Utley, *Rap and Religion: Understanding the Gangsta's God* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012), 3.

Despite the high levels of integrity, accomplishment, transparency and dignity that President Obama brought to the Oval Office, a racist backlash began to brew the day he took office, and exploded in 2016 with the election of Donald Trump. Since 2006, white identity hate groups have more than tripled in membership.<sup>6</sup> Racial violence and terrorism has increased. Racist language and hateful legislations are again passing in some state legislatures in America. Many black people have come to believe that America is racist to the core and will never change. American society is at a crossroad, and it appears that it will go limping down the wrong path to the past.

*The Cultural Manifestations of Being in Community*

There is an old saying, the origin of which is unknown, “Be who you is, not who you ain’t. Because if you ain’t who you is, then you ain’t.” This ontological affirmation has just as much meaning today than it did a hundred years ago. Humanity must be who it is. The challenge is to truly know who we are, and to know in what ways we need to change for the future.

Though it is true that labels used to distinguish people by “race” have little or no biological meaning,<sup>7</sup> the cultural differences are vast. The Senegalese historian and physicist, Cheikh Anta Diop offers the “Two Cradle Theory,” which explains how the climatic differences between the African continent and Europe, after humanity migrated

<sup>6</sup> Think: Opinion, Analysis, Essays, “Why is This Happening?” nbcnews.com, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/rise-white-identity-politics-didn-t-start-trump-explains-michael-ncna926191>

<sup>7</sup> The New York Times, “Do Races Differ? Not Really, Genes Show,” accessed January 10, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/22/science/do-races-differ-not-really-genes-show.html>.

from Africa over 50,000 years ago, produced very different cultural dynamics. The Southern Cradle “was in Africa along the Nile from the Great Lakes region (Lake Nyanza) to the Delta on the Mediterranean Sea.” The Northern Cradle “took place on the Eurasian Continent.” Diop states that “Because of the general benevolence of the environment in the Southern Cradle man developed an agricultural, sedentary culture with a matrifocal social structure. The environment engendered in the people a peaceful and cooperative disposition.” On the other hand, “the ‘ferocity’ of nature in the Northern Cradle caused man to develop a plundering nomadic culture with a patriarchal social structure.”<sup>8</sup> It may be that racism is a manifestation of the European’s “plundering nomadic culture.” Another potential manifestation is what Robin Horton calls the “manipulative,” “explanation/prediction/control” side of the religions of the West, as opposed to the “communion” side of religion in African religions.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the popular belief that racism has always existed, it is a relatively current social phenomenon. Racism emerged as a justification for slavery in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>10</sup> Just as it came into existence, it can eventually go out of existence if society is willing to let it go. Presently it is a very real factor in how humanity defines itself.

Racism impacts and impedes the progress of black people in several ways. It affects how we view Biblical people<sup>11</sup>, it provides others with a reason for making quick

<sup>8</sup> Jacob H. Carruthers, *Essays in Ancient Egyptian Studies* (Los Angeles, CA: The University of Sankore Press, 1984), 15-16.

<sup>9</sup> James Thrower, *Religion: The Classical Theories* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 120-121.

<sup>10</sup> Top Documentary Films, “Racism: A History,” British Broadcasting Corporation, accessed January 10, 2019, <https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/racism-history/>.

<sup>11</sup> Cain Hope Felder, *Stony the Road We Trod* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 144.

assumptions about us, it is falsely projected as a natural social force that will always exist, and it empowers those who have benefited from it to continue to cause more harm to those who suffer due to it.

Most important, for the purpose of this project, is understanding the impacts that racism has on our potential for developing shared values based on love that can lead to healing relationships and establishing new relationships with the right foundation.

The three most important ways that racism impacts and impedes the potential for developing shared values and community, for black people in America, are through the vilification and criminalization of black men, the promotion of violence in the Black community, and the justification of self-hatred of Blackness.

When the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution was passed in 1865, it basically ended legal slavery throughout America. The only exception was for those who are imprisoned felons. According to the Constitution they are actually enslaved. Black people make up 38.1% of the U.S. prison population and are only 13% of the U.S. population.<sup>12</sup>

The high conviction rate of black men is not an accident. It is an intentional result of institutional racism and has a devastating effect on the Black family and community as a whole. One out of every ten black children in America has a parent in prison, but this is only the case for one white child out of every sixty.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Federal Bureau of Prisons, Statistics: “Inmate Race,” accessed January 10, 2019, [https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics\\_inmate\\_race.jsp](https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_race.jsp)

<sup>13</sup> The Marshall Project, “A Mass Incarceration Mystery,” accessed January 10, 2019, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2017/12/15/a-mass-incarceration-mystery>

Professor Michelle Alexander brings attention to this tragedy in her book, *The New Jim Crow*. She provides a comprehensive look at the comparative dynamics of slavery and imprisonment. She determined that black men are being targeted for mass incarceration by the criminal justice system before actually encountering it, throughout imprisonment, and after incarceration. She states that “Today a criminal freed from prison has scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a freed slave or a black person living ‘free’ in Mississippi at the height of Jim Crow. Those released from prison on parole can be stopped and searched by the police for any reason—or no reason at all—and returned to prison for the most minor of infractions.”<sup>14</sup>

Many states are responding to overcrowded prisons by use of tracking technology which allows the convicted to serve part, if not all, of their time in the community. More so than other communities, the Black community is affected by police swat tactics, arrests, convictions, incarcerations, recidivism and psychological damage due to the whole process.

Furthermore, there is a level of respect given to the one returning from being “away” or “away at college” (code language for being in prison) on the “street” level. Serving time in prison is one of the ways that someone can get “street cred.” This ghetto currency may be the most valuable thing that someone has after prison. In most cases, they are uneducated and unskilled. They return with physical and mental scars. Many of them live in fear of what will happen if they can’t find their way, or if they lose their way and are locked up again.

<sup>14</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010), 141.

In the larger society, many of them suffer from the stigma of having been convicted. Their families also suffer in silence. They are careful to not discuss the incarceration of a loved one because they feel that it reflects negatively on them.

The Black Church should be one of those places where someone returning to the community from prison can find their way. However, most churches in the Black community provide no programs for those imprisoned, formerly imprisoned or their families. According to Professor Alexander, they may even provide a barrier. She reveals the following:

Even in church, a place where people seek solace in times of grief and sorrow, families of prisoners often keep secret the imprisonment of their children or relatives. As one woman responded when asked if she could turn to her church members for support, ‘Church? I wouldn’t dare tell anyone at church.’ Far from being a place of comfort or refuge, churches can be a place where judgement, shame, and contempt are felt most acutely.<sup>15</sup>

She further states:

Black churches, in the cultural narrative, are places where the ‘good’ black people in the community can be found. To the extent that the imprisonment of one’s son or relative (or one’s own imprisonment) is experienced as a personal failure—a failure of personal responsibility—church can be a source of fresh pain rather than comfort.”<sup>16</sup>

Under these circumstances, how can those caught in this crisis find community? There are some churches in the Black community who have taken up this cause. They serve as “Stations of Hope” for Healing Communities USA. Healing Communities was founded by Rev. Dr. Harold Dean “Doc” Trulear as a ministry to families affected by the

<sup>15</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 166.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 167.

criminal justice system. They have a network of churches serving across America.<sup>17</sup> Ministries like Healing Communities provide great hope for the families they serve, and the communities where they are found. It provides a wonderful model for healthy relationships between the church and the community it serves, and the incarcerated and their families.

In addition to the criminalization of black men, the other two ways that racism impedes or impacts our potential for shared values is the promotion of violence in the Black community by way of media images that glorify violence, and the justification of self-hatred of Blackness through media images that strongly imply that success is linked to dressing, talking and looking as much like a white person as possible. Though the acceptance of natural hair (i.e., afros, dreadlocks and braids) has increased within the last decade, it is largely driven by current fads. It is the same commitment to fads that has men shaving their heads balled, and growing out their facial hairs; and has males and females coloring their hair into various bright colors.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, scientific, religious and philosophical justifications for the belief that black people were inferior, or not human, were used to justify slavery. They also argued that our ancestors were “Godless heathen,” and needed Jesus. Slavery was largely justified in these ways in order to make “good white folk” comfortable with enslaving and abusing millions of black people. As misinformed as many whites were, they believed what they were taught.<sup>18</sup> Why would they treat what they thought were

<sup>17</sup> Healing Communities USA, accessed on January 10, 2019, <http://www.healingcommunitiesusa.com/team-members>.

<sup>18</sup> Larry Brayboy, *The Black Church in America Preparing for a New Century* (Indianapolis, IN: Popular Truth Publishing, 2012), 75.

animals, as equals? This programming also affected the minds of the enslaved to the point that many of them came to believe they were slaves. They were not captured as slaves, some were made slaves or born into it, while many knew they were only enslaved. Those were the ones who knew who they were, not accepting what they were called.

Similarly, when the criminal justice system, educational system, scientific community, and religious institutions identify certain black people as inferior, many in society believe it.

While black people lived in segregation, we generally lived with a level of dignity. Whether we lived in cities, towns, or certain communities in a larger city, we lived with a level of self-respect. We honored shared values, such as honoring the elders, caring for the children, maintaining community safety, facilitating economic strength, and holding one another accountable. Certainly, there were some who violated the disciplined social norms of the community, but they were the exceptions. They were sometimes viewed as having a slave mentality.

When society told them they were lazy, inferior, ignorant or criminals, they believed it and lived “up” to the standards set for them. Under these circumstances, they will rob, rape, and kill on disproportionate levels, because they are “out of their natural minds.” They don’t know who they are, and they don’t know what love for self and others is. They only know self-hatred and selfishness.

A saying that was once commonly heard in the Black Church was “God is a heart fixer and a mind regulator.” This phrase speaks of salvific renewal and mental readjustment. The question is, can the Black Church make the readjustment from self-hatred to self-love? Can it embrace the theme made known by Dr. Rueben Sheares of

being “Unashamedly Black and unapologetically Christian?”<sup>19</sup> Can it be a vehicle for Black liberation and freedom? The words of Gayraud S. Wilmore describe this freedom as “...the freedom of a person as a child of God, the freedom to be himself and herself fully, to realize the most creative potential of his or her psychophysiological nature.”<sup>20</sup>

### **The Theoretical Foundation in Ministerial Practice**

#### *The Cultural Meaning of Systematic Agapism*

*Agapism* is a deontological (i.e., duty or obligation based) ethical theory that is rooted in the love ethics of the Bible. It reflects the scriptural commandment to love God, neighbor and self, and is derived from the Greek term used in the New Testament, *agape*.<sup>21</sup> In general, agapism is the belief in love as selfless, spiritual and charitable. Philosopher Charles S. Pierce shared meaningful perspectives on agapism. Pierce argued that there are three evolutionary modes. They are *tychism* (absolute chance), *anancism* (mechanical necessity), and *agapism* (the law of love). He considered agapism as the highest level of evolution because elements of the other two are found, and even fulfilled, in it.<sup>22</sup> This reflects the belief shared by many theologians and philosophers (e.g., Augustine, Tillich and King), that love is the greatest good, and that all other goods spring from it.

<sup>19</sup> John R. Porter, *Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr and President Barack H. Obama: Role Models for Excellence in Leadership* (Chicago, IL: Porter on Violence Publisher, 2016), 301.

<sup>20</sup> Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 219.

<sup>21</sup> Moral Philosophy, “Deontology,” accessed January 8, 2019, <https://moralphilosophy.info/normative-ethics/deontology/>

<sup>22</sup> Charles S. Pierce, *The Monist*, Vol 3. accessed January 8, 2019, <https://books.google.com/books?id=XKoLAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA188#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

Agapism is not a popularly known or utilized term, but it is what numerous authors, song writers, poets and preachers are speaking of when they talk about using or sharing the power of love. Anyone who believes in the power and preeminence of love as an ethical imperative, is an agapist.

*Systematic Agapism* is a term coined for this project, and it reflects an effort to personalize agapism to fit a certain cultural context. It takes into consideration the nature of agapism as spiritual, selfless and charitable, while accounting for the historical, theological, and cultural nuances of those to share in love as a community. In this case, it seeks to create an ethical foundation for loving within the Black community.

### *How the Church Failed to Love*

The Black Church in America has a unique foundation. To a large degree, it came into being due to racism. In early American history, churches were largely integrated.<sup>23</sup> In the mid to late 1800s, many black parishioners were placed in the uncomfortable position of having to share worship space in congregations that treated them as inferior. It was this kind of racism that led to Richard Allen and Absalom Jones leaving the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1787. The African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Colored Methodist Episcopal Church and several Black Baptist churches came into being because of racism they experienced in churches where they used to share fellowship with whites.

<sup>23</sup> Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1987), 207.

Therefore, the White Church in America failed to love according to the standard set in Matthew 25:36. It failed to love its neighbors, or to be selfless. It failed to show justice. It made black bodies “naked” and failed to cover their nakedness. It “imprisoned” them and failed to visit the imprisoned. It generated mental and physical sickness and failed to visit the sick. It denied the humanity of millions and its congregants made billions through slavery in the process.<sup>24</sup>

It is for these reasons that love must be qualified, and why agapism must be systematized. The white Christians who committed these evils often did it in the “name of God.” They often quoted scriptures and spoke of loving one’s neighbor. They surely would have considered themselves agapists. If agapism is simply something that is good by nature (deontologically), and allows atrocities, then unqualified agapism has no value to black people. If one’s oppressor says they love the one they oppress, either the oppressor has lied, or the love is imbalanced against the oppressed.

It would be wonderful if racism had no impact on the contemporary church. Yet, the reality is racism in the White Church is “alive and well.” Surely, there are many white congregants who are sincerely loving toward others of the congregation who are not white. Without question, there are some predominantly white congregations that take strong positions against racism and injustice. But, it is also obviously true that most white congregations are silent on issues of racism and injustice. There are even those that take strong positions in favor of racist politicians, as long as that politician agrees to condemn

<sup>24</sup> John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1972), 169-170.

certain sins (and “sinners”) in the process.<sup>25</sup> Many of them have well defined religious opinions about how their racist, sexist and homophobic views are rooted in love.

Most likely, there are true expressions of agapism in these racist congregations. The members of these congregations may be truly “happy in Jesus.” Yet, they are oblivious to the pain their silence perpetuates among the neighbors they fail to love.

It’s not the love that is imperfect, it is the lover. This type of lover is selective about how much they will allow love to be received and shared in their life. This is not exclusively true for white congregants, it’s true for all congregations to one degree or another. In every congregation are those who mitigate love.

Even in some Black churches, there are those who are very uncomfortable when their pastor takes a stance against racism or injustice. In the churches where this mindset prevails, the most they will do is “take it to the altar and leave it there.” When it comes to racism in America, “all have sinned, and fall short of” the call to love.

It must also be stated that one of the main ways the Church has failed, and continues to fail, to love is by its racial iconism of Jesus as white. For the most part, the Church continues to portray Biblical figures as white, when it is widely known that the people of the Bible were not. Furthermore, there is ample archeological, genetic, historical and Biblical evidence to show that they were black (to use a familiar phrase).<sup>26</sup> If the Church and world would ask itself why it is uncomfortable with believing Jesus is black, it would have to say it’s because of their hatred (or, at least, lack of love) of

<sup>25</sup> “Op Ed: Evangelicals Have a Role in Political Life. It isn’t Fawning Over Trump,” Los Angeles Times, accessed on January 24, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-01-24/i-questioned-trumps-moral-fitness-for-office-in-christianity-today>

<sup>26</sup> Anyike, *Historical Christianity African Centered*, 129-149.

Blackness.<sup>27</sup> There is no present-day reason for Jesus and Biblical people to be portrayed as white, other than for racist reasons. To continue to do so is to perpetuate white superiority and supremacy. Minister and activist Jim Wallis calls racism “America’s original sin.”<sup>28</sup> Will Coleman, in his book *Tribal Talk*, calls white supremacy “demonic,” and he defines its nature as “obsessed with pigmentation,” “seeks to justify itself on the basis of someone else’s alleged inferiority,” and “it creates mythologies, philosophies and theologies of ethnic superiority and inferiority.”<sup>29</sup> By its nature, white supremacy is anti-agapism because of its clear selfishness alone. It taints American history, continues as America’s sin, and may lead to America’s demise. Where there is sin, there must be repentance if one is to be redeemed.

It is somewhat encouraging that a great deal of conversation takes place among candidates running for President of the United States about establishing government programs, resources and commitments to serve as forms of reparation for African Americans. There is also conversation about protecting the voter’s rights of black people, and the threat that white supremacy poses to the future of America.<sup>30</sup>

It was necessary to show how the Church is failing to love before constructing a systematic agapism that allows love to be at its best in these challenging times. If

<sup>27</sup> Blackness is being used here as a holistic term representing the racial, physical, historical, cultural and potential aspects of black people.

<sup>28</sup> Jim Wallis, *America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*. (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> Will Coleman, *Tribal Talk* (Pennsylvania, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 194.

<sup>30</sup> Julia Cravin, “What the Whitest Democratic Debate Stage Had to Say About Race” slate.com, accessed Dec. 20, 2019, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/12/mostly-white-democrats-debate-race.html>

systematic agapism is to serve as a foundation for shared values for the Black community, it must be presented void of racism or any other elements that would call into question its spirituality and selflessness.

*Systematic Agapism and the Black Church*

According to comedian Dick Gregory “If it were not for the black woman and the Black Church, we would not have survived as a people.”<sup>31</sup> The connecting of the woman and the Church in this way, conveys a wonderful message about love. It takes into consideration the historical role of the Church as the center of life in the Black community, and the role of the woman as the center of life in the Black home. In former days, no one would question the love or power of either. However, we now live in times when both are questioned daily.

In many Black communities, the local church is viewed as a weekly entertainment center (at best), and the black woman is characterized as a distressed single mother. Rather than being celebrated for her love, she is sexualized and exploited as an object for love making.

Scott United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, provides an excellent point of reference for the challenges to, and potential for, establishing the local church as a love center in the Black community. Within a two-mile radius of Scott Church, 70 percent of the homes are led by single parents, and the marriage rate is 22.4 percent.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Stated during a personal conversation between the author, James C. Anyike, and Mr. Dick Gregory in 2006 in Rev. Anyike’s office at Christ United Methodist Church in Gary, Indiana.

<sup>32</sup> “Marital Status in the Center Township, Marion County, Indiana.” U.S. Census 2010. Accessed January 8, 2019 <https://statisticalatlas.com/county-subdivision/Indiana/Marion-County/Center-Township/Marital-Status>

Within the congregation, there are more people who have been divorced or separated than those married. No marriage is perfect, but the ones with the right foundation last (or last longer), and provide the best foundation for strong churches, communities, and families.

The human experience is full of relationships. There are relationships between spouses, neighbors, church members, parents and children, teachers and students, politicians and constituents, police and citizens, business owners and consumers, and health care workers and patients. Where the relationships are healthy, there is the best potential for progress. Where the relationships are unhealthy, there is the potential for confusion and failure.

These are dark times in many Black communities. In addition to shattered family structures, there is racial oppression, violent crime, poor educational systems, a lack of local markets with fresh foods, health concerns (i.e., high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, autism and Alzheimer's), and high levels of depression. Many churches struggle to minister to the varied needs of its members, but they can barely make a difference. They have too much competition from members struggling with substance abuse, sexual addictions, legal problems, pursuit of material gain, manipulative medias, religious misinformation, and miseducation.

The Black family and Black Church are what Dr. Robert Michael Franklin refers to as “anchor institutions.” He defines them as “institutions that have an enduring presence and operate to stabilize people amidst chaos and rapid transition.”<sup>33</sup> In this case, schools, businesses and social centers with long standing connections to a community are

<sup>33</sup> Robert M. Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 4.

also anchor institutions. These institutions used to share the same values. They all believed in honoring the elders, caring for the children, maintaining community safety, facilitating economic strength, and holding one another accountable. These were the elements of a strong community.

Where there are strong communities, one will find strong homes. Where there are strong homes, will be found strong people. Where we find strong people, we'll find a source (or sources) from which they draw their strength. The Black Church is in the best position to be a conduit for the source that is needed. This can happen when a Black church commits itself to be a love center. There is no greater source than God's love.

United Methodist Bishop, Robert Schnase says it this way, "The first movement toward the new creation, the transformed life, and becoming the person God wants us to be begins when we face the startling reality of God's unconditional love for us."<sup>34</sup> It is this transformative love—this *agape*—that is the power needed as the source for strong lives, homes and communities.

Surely, many hearts are "waxed cold" because of the hardships they have been subject to. Many children have been sexually abused. Mothers have been physically abused. Men have been targeted and imprisoned by law enforcement. Lives have been ruined by drug addictions. Many suffer from poor mental health.

Seminar leader and author Romal Tune describes how experiencing God's unconditional love enabled him to love himself and others. He was born to a drug addicted mother, and he had deep love and trust issues. The numbers of black people who feel like Tune felt are probably in the millions. In his book, *Love is an Inside Job*, Tune

<sup>34</sup> Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Living*, (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2010),17.

recalls how, “So many mistakes and fractured relationships have been the result of my inability to let love in.” He recounts the importance of allowing himself to be vulnerable to love, and he declared “I couldn’t experience God’s love for me without being vulnerable.”<sup>35</sup>

If a Black church is to be a love center, it must create space for people to be vulnerable. This space must be one wherein there is no judgement, condemnation, dress codes, time limitations, prerequisite rituals or pushy preachers.

In too many churches the minister depends on preaching, Bible studies and evangelistic efforts to be the main methods for sharing God’s love and transforming lives. These methods are important and necessary in the right circumstances. But, these methods should be secondary. Though a new convert can be reached through preaching, Bible studies and/or street witnessing, they were probably already primed by what happened before their public conversion experience. They would not have come to hear the preacher, attend the Bible study, or stop to talk to an evangelist unless something inside them already convinced them to let down their guard to hear God.

The challenge for the church is to be a place where people can come with their guards up, and the church will allow the love of God to disarm them. In a 1984 sermon, Dr. Samuel Proctor said “Good religion meets life right where it is and deals with it.”<sup>36</sup> He described the work of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, in New York, as a love center with these words:

<sup>35</sup> Romal Tune, *Love is an Inside Job* (New York, NY: FaithWorks-Hachette Book Group, 2018), 2-7.

<sup>36</sup> Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, Editors, *Preaching With Sacred Fire* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 809.

Dr. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., pastor from 1908 to 1948, and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., created an expectation among the people that the church was the healing agent and that we had some kind of answer to every crisis. And we labor with the conviction that this is our calling in ministry—to be the voice, the eyes, the hands, and the feet of Jesus in this present world.”<sup>37</sup>

The church that is a love center, is not only a place of healing, it is a place of hearing, touching, and hope. Far too often when someone comes to the church in distress, the person counseling them will take a few minutes to try to hear a physical need to be met. They assume the person needs food, gas, housing or money for utilities. Very often, these physical needs are results of deeper troubles. The love center must be a place where people are listened to, and their deeper needs heard. It must be the place where they can be touched.

In a brief recollection, Bishop Woodie White said “I recently heard a speaker say that every person requires at least seven hugs a day. I don’t especially agree with that kind of formula. It seems too obligatory. However, it expresses the need for each person to experience human touch, the warmth of another human being.”<sup>38</sup>

Pastor Rudy Rasmus shares numerous stories about the power of physical touch in his book, *TOUCH: Pressing Against the Wounds of a Broken World*. In one story he shares the experiences of a surgeon in Texas who was repulsed by the poor hygiene of some patients, and limited touching them to a minimum—rushing through consultations before or after the surgeries. One day the physician was reading the scriptures, and realized how Jesus touched lepers, the blind, the lame, and those with other sicknesses.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Proctor, *Samuel Proctor: My Moral Odyssey*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1989), pg.158.

<sup>38</sup> Woodie White, *Conversations of the Heart* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1991), 33.

From that day forward, the doctor became intentional about touching and giving long hugs to patients, especially the “smelly ones.”<sup>39</sup> The church that is a love center must find ways to be the hands and arms of God, touching those who long for loving physical contact.

The church that is a love center must be a place of hope. Far too many people in the Black community have lost hope. Hope is defined as “having expectations or to anticipate and wait for a desired good that brings satisfaction and joy.”<sup>40</sup> This is where preaching and Bible studies can play an important role. These ministries can be powerful conduits for revealing God’s plans and possibilities for someone’s life. When someone knows that God loves them enough to make them a part of his divine will, they realize that their life has a value beyond what they ever believed. From this experience they find the source they need to draw more strength than they ever imagined.

## Conclusion

The Black community in America has some hard decisions to make. It must first understand who it is. It must understand that it is made up of people who are descendants of the enslaved, those people of African descent who have migrated to America, those who are of mixed European or Native American heritage, those who are married to black people, and those who live in the Black community and take on its challenges as their own.

<sup>39</sup> Rudy Rasmus, *TOUCH: Pressing Against the Wounds of a Broken World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2007), 51-52.

<sup>40</sup> Anne E Streaty Wimberly & Sarah Frances Farmer, *Raising Hope: 4 Paths to Courageous Living for Black Youth* (Nashville, TN: Wesley’s Foundery Books, 2017), 29.

Furthermore, the Black Church has some hard decisions to make also. It must (or at least should) take on a commitment to a sociotheological worldview that will convey its awareness (ontologically) of who it is, and is becoming. In 1969 Dr. James Cone said "The task of Black Theology is to analyze the black man's condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ with a purpose of a new understanding of black dignity among black people, and providing the necessary soul in that people, to destroy white racism."<sup>41</sup> The responsible Black Church does not have the luxury of ignoring its past traumas, present challenges, and future potential.

The Black Church and community must realize that there is power in our loving ourselves. It must deeply consider systematic agapism as a guiding motivation for all that it does to heal and (re)establish itself.

The Black community must claim/reclaim Black churches (that are willing to participate) as the best anchor institutions to serve as the love centers for acquiring the source for its systematic agapism. There is no other institution in America that can mobilize and influence large numbers of people in the Black community like the Black Church can.

The Black churches must remove their barriers and accept the call to be love centers. They must be at the forefront of boldly rejecting any form of racism (especially white depictions of Jesus and other Biblical persons) and must become strong advocates of systematic agapism as a foundation for implementing shared values that can lead to restoring broken relationships and establishing relationships with the right foundation.

<sup>41</sup> Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, 117.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

The initial intent, in doing this project, was to develop concepts and practices that can be used and promoted by churches in the Black community to reduce conflicts and build connections. Though the church can and should serve as the best means to share these practices, they must also be shared by individuals, families, and other entities in the Black community (i.e., schools, businesses, social organizations, media outlets, etc.). These practices specifically involve adapting a system of shared values based on love (i.e., systematic agapism). Through shared values healthy relationships can be facilitated in the Black community. Special emphasis is being placed on the development, maintenance and success of committed relationships as a foundation for healthy families, churches and communities.

Churches in the Black community committing themselves to be love centers would be a wonderful outcome. However, what will be far more profound and meaningful, would be these churches finding their identity. The church in the Black community should not be defined by what it does. It should do what it does because of who it is. When warning his disciples about false prophets, Jesus said “Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree

bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, apple trees produce apples, and black walnut trees produce black walnuts. Trees produce according to what they are made to produce.

Too often, the Christian and the local church go against their God inspired nature and will to be or produce what they should not. Apples are great, especially inside of a delicious apple pie. Black walnuts are good, but they are great inside of a half-gallon of Blue Bell Black Walnut Ice cream. When the local church goes against its nature, and seeks to look, talk, sing, pray, shout or preach like some other church, they can only become a good imitation of another church. It’s always better to be a good “you,” than to be a great imitation of someone else.

A church planted in the Black community must produce according to its nature and the needs of its environment. It should not ignore the racial realities all around it. I should not “carry the water” of “the Church,” if the water is tainted with racist impurities. It must feed the food insufficient hungry, heal the environmentally contaminated sick, visit the disproportionately convicted imprisoned, and cloth the sexually manipulated naked in their own congregations and communities.

The Christian and the local church must love. Jesus said “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”<sup>2</sup> The call to

<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 7:16b – 20

<sup>2</sup> See Matthew 22:37-40

love is not a suggestion, it is a commandment. Christian love begins with neighbors. It's good when a local church sends missionaries 2000 miles away to "share the love of Jesus." But, if they fail to love the person who is two city blocks away, they have failed to love God. Can there be a greater failure? John "the Revelator" is recorded as saying "We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."<sup>3</sup>

Some churches, and Christians, excuse their lack of love for others by thinking that those who are "unbelievers" are outside of the love mandate. They are wrong. For many of us, God's love reached us while we were unbelievers. We must undergird our efforts to serve with our commitment to love. If we are to heal, establish and maintain healthy relationships, we must begin with love.

This effort to heal and develop relationships through shared values based on systematic agapism provides a practical approach that can be used in the church and community. It reflects the natural love instinct and desire for connection with others that is in all of us.

Defining and fulfilling this project involved understanding the contextual setting, doing meaningful research, engaging in much prayer and meditation, sharing the work with so many wonderful people, and allowing the process to transform and refine me. Specifically, in doing the programmatic parts of the work: I shared three sermons, surveyed seventy people, presented one conference, held three community forums, and

<sup>3</sup> See 1 John 4:20-21

presented a radio program on the need for shared values in the Black community. I also engaged in very helpful conversations with my mentors, professional associates, contextual associates, focus group members, family members, and good friends. Through this Final Chapter, it will be shown how this work culminates into wonderful opportunities for us to heal and develop our relationships, learn to love, and restore our commitments to shared values within the Black community.

## **The Methodology**

### *The Survey*

The first step involved surveying people within the context of the project. The primary purpose for the survey was to explore why relationships work, or don't work. The hypothesis that led to this project is that the Black community used to have shared values. Those shared values influenced the community's ability to maintain healthy relationships. Over the last forty years, we have lost our commitment to shared values. Our marriages are failing, we have lost generational continuity, our neighbors are strangers to us, our churches are disconnected from the local community, men and women are socially out of sync, the man is not in the home, and the children are left on their own.

The survey was a way to explore what caused, or is causing, our being disconnected from each other. It was assumed that the lack of shared values would emerge as one of the main factors. However, in definitive terms, it did not. The survey is also a way to determine, to what degree people in relationships may be willing to formally commit to share values based on systematic agapism. Based on the survey

results, the evidence for this is great.

The survey was taken by seventy people from the Martindale-Brightwood community, on the east side of Indianapolis. Almost all (about 80%) of the participants took the survey at Scott United Methodist Church, though less than half are members of the church. Most of the participants are between the ages of thirty and sixty. Sixty-nine of the participants are black, and one is white. These are people who either work, worship or live in the community at the present time or in the past.

They were given written and verbal instructions to answer the questions relative to a person in their lives. They had a range of categories to choose from in answering the questions. The categories were lovers, spouses, neighbors, church members, co-workers, parents and children, teachers and students, politicians and constituents, police and citizens, businesses and consumers, and health care providers and patients. These are the questions that were asked on the survey:

- 1) What makes your relationship work?
- 2) What causes problems in your relationship?
- 3) In what ways are you similar or different as individuals?
- 4) What belief systems do you hold to?
- 5) How long have you been in the relationship?
- 6) How has the local church influenced your relationship?
- 7) What role has race played in your relationship?
- 8) Are you pleased with the relationship?
- 9) Did you enter the relationship by choice or obligation?
- 10) What role does religion play in your relationship?
- 11) Do they see your relationship with them as a lifelong commitment?
- 12) What role does gender play in your relationship?
- 13) What role does age play in your relationship?
- 14) What role does income play in your relationship?
- 15) What role does love play in your relationship?

Survey participants were asked to answer these questions in general terms in reference to one person within the chosen category. The categories that were chosen by

survey takers were as follows: Eight (11%) chose teacher to student; two (3%) chose student to teacher; three (4%) chose co-worker to co-worker; two (3%) chose friend to friend; one (1.4%) chose health care provider to patient; one (1.4%) chose patient to health care provider; ten (14%) chose church member to church member; three (4%) chose pastor to church member; one (1.4%) chose church member to pastor; thirteen (19%) chose spouse to spouse; six (9%) chose business owner to consumer; two (3%) chose consumer to business owner; four (6%) chose neighbor to neighbor; two (3%) chose lover to lover; three (4%) chose child to parent; and nine (13%) chose parent to child.

Several interesting observations came from the surveys. The first observation is the categories people chose. It's interesting that the category chosen most was spouse to spouse, with thirteen of the seventy (19%) choosing this category. The second most chosen category was church member to church member, with ten out of seventy (14%) choosing this category. This means that nearly 35% of the participants chose within these categories. What's common in these categories is the long-term commitments we make in both. When a person joins a church or gets married, it is expected that they may be in it for the rest of their life. A recent Gallup poll shows that 50% of American adults are church members, which is down nearly 20% from 1999.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the divorce rate in America is slightly lower than 47%, down from nearly 50% in 2007. The lower divorce rates speak more to the increase in cohabitation, and less to the value younger people place on marriage.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Courthouse News Service, "Church Membership in US Has Plummeted in 20 Years," Associated Press, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.courthousenews.com/church-membership-in-us-has-plummeted-in-20-years/>

The value placed on category choices may only be anecdotal, but it is interesting. A more extensive and thorough study could determine if the commitments we make in marriage and church membership are the relationships most important, or most on our minds.

Another interesting observation is that the majority of those who participated in the survey answered the questions in general, without thinking of a particular person. This was not a problem for those who spoke of their spouse. The problem may have been a lack of clarity in giving instructions for the survey. They were instructed to think of an individual in responding to the questions, and to answer the questions in general. The instruction to answer “in general” may have been misunderstood to mean speaking of the persons in the category in general. In other words, rather than a person who chose “friend to friend” speaking of a specific friend, they spoke of their experiences with friends in general. This did not change the outcome, or pose any problems in gathering the desired information. Since the objective is to understand what interferes with, or enhances these different relationships, the answers to the questions work well regardless of the survey taker speaking of an individual or individuals in general.

What’s most important is that the survey yielded very interesting results that help to explain why many relationships succeed or fail. The process used in analyzing the data began with determining which answers (or answers with the same meaning) were given most for each question by the majority of those who completed the survey. Consideration was then given to how the answers relate to relationships succeeding or failing.

<sup>5</sup> Marisa Lascala, “The U.S. Divorce Rate Is Going Down, and We Have Millennials to Thank,” Good House Keeping, <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/relationships/a26551655/us-divorce-rate/>

The first question was “What makes your relationship work?” The majority responses (53%) were *communication* and *love*. Communication, or terms related to it, was the top answer, chosen twenty-three times (33%). Love was chosen fourteen times (20%). With the exception of *respect*, which was chosen twelve times, the other answers were given by five people or less. They included *financial gain*, *being treated right*, *motivated by God*, *being dedicated*, *honesty* and *having a good time*. The choice of communication conveys that the participants value talking, listening, being informed, and awareness of what is happening in the life of others. The choice of love could convey appreciation for intimacy, close friendships, caring fellowships, and/or sacrificial giving. Both qualities (communication and love) contribute to making relationships work because they involve personal exchanges that, if done consistently, allow those in the relationship to feel more confident that they can put their trust in one another. Through communication, they get to know each other better. Through love, they can share with, and sacrifice for, one another more.

The second question was “What causes problems in your relationship?” The majority responses (47%) were *bad communication* (i.e., miscommunication or lack of communication) and *dishonesty*. Bad communication was the top answer, chosen twenty-eight times (40%). Dishonesty was chosen five time (7%). The other answers were chosen four times or less. They include *disagreements*, *money issues*, *selfishness*, *neglect*, *bad expectations*, *different beliefs*, *disobedience to God*, *lack of commitment* and *lack of love*. Just as good communication contributes to a good relationship, bad communication contributes to problems in the relationship. Dishonesty is a worser form of bad communication, because it involves an intent to mislead. Most of the other responses

given (e.g., disagreements, money issues, selfishness, neglect, bad expectations, and different beliefs) can also be products of bad communication. It is obvious that bad communication is the primary reason why relationships don't work among the participants.

The third question is "In what ways are you similar or different as individuals?" The majority answers (54%) were *shared beliefs, similar personalities, similar interests, and same backgrounds*. All of these answers are similar. Shared beliefs was chosen fourteen times (20%). Similar personality was chosen eleven times (16%). Similar interests was chosen eight times (11%). Same background was chosen five times (7%). Other answers that show similarities, which were chosen two times or less, were *same dedication, similar experiences, shared values, high standards, and same work ethic*. The answers given that show differences were chosen five times or less, They were *different beliefs, different personalities, communicate differently, different backgrounds, different gender expectations, and different careers*. These responses show how participants are likely to engage in relationships with those who they have more in common with.

The fourth question is "What belief systems do you hold to?" The majority answers (63%) were *Christian* and *belief in God*. Christian was the top response, chosen thirty-three times (47%). Belief in God was chosen eleven times (16%). With the exception of *living right* (chosen five times) and *love* (chosen four times), the other responses were chosen two times or less. They are *treating others right, prayer, family, keeping the Biblical Laws, and living with integrity*. Since most of the surveys were completed by participants attending programs at Scott United Methodist Church, it is understandable that most of the participants are Christians or believe in God. Relatively

speaking, 50% of adult Americans identify as church members.<sup>6</sup> A 2014 Pew poll determined that 47% of black adults attend church once a week, and another 36% attend once or twice a month.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, 63% of participants responding as Christians or believers in God is consistent with the national trends reported in the 2014 Pew poll and the current Gallup poll mentioned earlier. By combining the top four answers (Christian, belief in God, living right and love), we find that 76% of the participants are committed to beliefs that are consistent with each other. These religious beliefs are, most likely, shared in common and serve as a unifying factor in the participants relationships.

The fifth question is “How long have you been in the relationship?” The top answers ranged from *10-19 years* sixteen times (23%), and *1-3 years* thirteen times (19%). The other responses ranged from *4-9 years* (eleven times), *20-29 years* (nine times), *most of my life* (eight times), *40-49 years* (seven times), *30-39 years* (five times), *50-59 years* (five times), *60-69 years* (once). Depending on the category of relationship a participant was responding to, it is expected that some relationships would require a shorter period of time than others. As stated earlier, 34% of the participants chose spouse to spouse, or church member to church member categories, both of which generally imply a long relationship. However, for those who chose teacher to student, a shorter time period would be expected. In this category, five of the eight participants chose between 4-9 years to 40-49 years. Their choices of time may reflect how long they taught, how long they stayed in contact with their students, or how long they believe their

<sup>6</sup> Courthouse News Service, “Church Membership in US Has Plummeted in 20 Years,” Associated Press, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.courthousenews.com/church-membership-in-us-has-plummeted-in-20-years/>

<sup>7</sup> Religious Landscape Study, “Attendance at Religious Services by Race/Ethnicity,” Pew Research Center, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/compare/attendance-at-religious-services/by/racial-and-ethnic-composition/>

teaching impacts (or impacted) a student. The responses to this question may reflect similar nuances across all categories. In general, the periods of time chosen in all categories are relatively close, from 1-3 years to 20-29 years, and from 30-39 years to 50-59 years. The impact of how long the participants are in the relationship cannot be determined from this study. The best that can be said is that more participants were (or are) in their relationships from one to twenty-nine years, than those from thirty to sixty-nine years.

The sixth question is “How has the local church influenced your relationship?” The majority responses (30%) were *provided community*, chosen 11 times (16%), and *provided good teaching*, chosen ten times (14%). Responses also included *strengthened it* (ten times), *it hasn’t* (nine times), *provided stability* (five times), *provided values* (five times), and *saved it* (3 times). Other responses given two times or less were *provided a customer base, tremendously, helped me to make it, and helped my prayer life*. It’s interesting to note that none of the responses indicate the local church having a negative impact on their relationship. For those who responded by saying it hasn’t, this could mean they have no connection to a local church, keep their church life and relationships separate, or that it simply has (or had) no impact. It is refreshing to see the various ways the local church positively influences relationships. This is further evidence of the potential for the local church to be the best place to promote shared values based of systematic agapism.

The seventh question is “What role has race played in your relationship?” The majority responses (48%) were *none*, chosen twenty-two times (31%), and *we’re the same race*, chosen twelve times (17%). The next responses chosen most were *negatively*

*impacted by another race* (ten times), *we share common interest* (seven times), *we share pride in our race* (five times), and *strengthened by a person of the same race* (three times). The responses chosen two times or less were *provides diversity*, *provides cultural awareness*, *provides support from another race*, *significant role*, *positively by a person of the same race*, *scrutinized by a person of another race*, and *highlights differences*. The survey participants include sixty-nine black people and one white person. It is obvious that some of the participants are (or were) in relationships with persons of a different race, but the majority responses are in reference to the same race. The participants who indicated no influence by race, and that they were of the same race (48% together), strongly implies that race has no impact on the relationships of the majority of the participants. This may also suggest that among the larger society (especially among people of the same race), race has little impact most of the time, positive influences many times, and negative influences some of the time.

The eighth question is “Are you pleased with the relationship?” Clearly, the majority response was *yes*, chosen fifty-four times (77%). This question yielded the most popular response of the survey. The other responses chosen were *no* (eight times), *sometimes* (seven times), and *challenged* (one time). This certainly does not mean that the relationships are without problems or challenges. It implies that the vast majority of our participants feel positively about their relationships. Further study would be necessary to determine why they are pleased, but, the fact that they are pleased, most likely, means they are inclined to remain in the relationship until something displeases them. It may be true that people don’t end relationships because they are displeased. Some may end for more practical reasons, such as someone relocating, someone finding a

better relationship/opportunity, or the relationship was not intended to last beyond a certain time frame. Being pleased with a relationship can be an important factor is formally agreeing to share values.

The ninth question is “Did you enter the relationship by choice or obligation?” The majority responses (81%) were *choice*, chosen forty-three times (61%), and *choice and obligation*, chosen fourteen times (20%). Other responses were *obligation* (nine times), *love* (one time), and *neither* (one time). On two of the surveys, this question was left unanswered. The responses were equally spread throughout the various categories. This means that most teachers, church members, parents and others, chose to enter the relationship. Some entered by choice and obligation, and a few entered by obligation alone. It is likely that those who chose their relationships will also be willing to strengthen their relationships by formally agreeing to share values.

The tenth question is “What role does religion play in your relationship?” The top three responses (38%) were *a major role*, chosen ten times (14%), *as the foundation*, chosen nine times (13%), and *provides guidance*, chosen eight times (11%). Other high responses were *none* (seven times), *to share love* (seven times), and *shared in common* (seven times). Responses that were chosen three times or less were *inspirational, bases for prayer together, creates conflict, strengthens it, and encourages patience*. What is clear from these responses is that religion plays a positive role in the relationships of almost all of the participants. The only negative response is that it creates conflict, chosen by two people. Because religion is generally believed to cause conflict, it's surprising that there were not more negative responses. It is often said that “religion has caused most of the world’s wars.” According to Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod, authors of the

*Encyclopedia of Wars*, of the 1763 wars they list, only “123 have been classified to involve a religious cause, accounting for less than 7% of all wars and less than 2% of all people killed in warfare.”<sup>8</sup> Religions are not perfect, but they do positively influence most of our participants, and perhaps the world. These results complement the role of the local church already highlighted. Even for people who don’t attend a place of worship, many have religious or spiritual beliefs that can facilitate greater potential for the acceptance of systematic agapism as a personal commitment.

The eleventh question is “Do they see your relationship with them as a lifelong commitment?” The majority response was *yes*, chosen forty-nine times (70%). The other responses were *no* (thirteen times), *maybe* (three times), and *I don’t know* (two times). Assuming the participant shares a similar level of commitment to the other person(s), the majority response strongly indicates that most of the relationships involving the participants are believed to be lifelong. These responses were basically the same across all categories. In many endeavors, there are those who keep “one foot in the door” in order to maintain a way of escape. There is always somebody who is looking for a better job, a better church, a better man or woman, a better neighborhood, or a better friend. But this majority response suggests that the participants, and those who they are in relationship with, expect a lifelong commitment. People who don’t have “one foot in the door” to leave, are more likely to stay in a relationship and work things out. The willingness to share lifelong commitments is an important factor in the potential for re-establishing shared values within the community. This effort to popularize a system of shared values based on systematic agapism may begin programmatically within

<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Alan Lurie, “Is Religion the Cause of Most Wars?” Huffpost, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/is-religion-the-cause-of\\_b\\_1400766](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/is-religion-the-cause-of_b_1400766)

institutions that promote it, but it must ultimately continue as a way of life within the black community.

The twelfth question is “What role does gender play in your relationship?” The majority response was *none*, chosen twenty-eight times (40%). The next highest response was *females who enjoy sharing the same gender*, chosen four times. The remaining responses were chosen three times or less. They were *the Biblical role of man as head of household, a parent protective of their female child, different treatment, female cautious of males, males disregard females, glad parent of girls, glad parent of boys, leads to miscommunication, son needs mother's energy, traditional gender roles, heterosexual preference in intimate relationships, major role, important mentor to same gender youth, different gender expectations, loves her femininity, and appreciates brotherhood*. No other question produced as wide a range of responses as this one. This may be an indication of the dynamic roles that gender plays in society, or the lack of shared values regarding gender roles. Many of the responses indicate positive aspects, but a few reflect the tension that exists among the genders. The majority response of “none” is hard to define. It could literally mean gender plays no role among most of the participants. It is possible that a strong commitment to communication may play an important role in bringing greater understanding and unity between males and females. The *Statement of Shared Values*, which will be shared later in this document, places great emphasis on communication.

The thirteenth question is “What role does age play in your relationship?” The majority responses (51%) were *none*, chosen twenty-four times (34%), and *we are in the same age range*, chosen twelve times (17%). Other relatively high answers were *respect*

*for elders* (seven times), *brings maturity* (six times), *more wisdom* (five times), and *there is a generation gap* (four times). The remaining answers were given two times or less. They are *need for maturity, relates well to elders, more experience, opportunity to mentor, prefer same age, and slowed down in old age*. More than half seeing no role for age, or being of the same age range, may indicate that most participants chose to partner with others in their age range. The responses adequately describe normal generational, intergenerational and extragenerational trends we see throughout society. This may indicate that the ancient shared value of “respect for elders” is still understood and adhered to. According to Dr. Floyd M. Wylie, “It is clear that among the more important of these values that continue to the present time are a certain respect and even veneration of age, and frequently strikingly different attitudes about the aging process and the role and place of the older person within the culture.”<sup>9</sup> In his article, entitled “Attitudes Toward Aging Among Black Americans,” he presents convincing evidence that respect for elders continues to be an important element among continental and diasporic people of African descent. Respect for elders continues to be a shared value within the Black community, and will be an important foundation for re-establishing shared values in the future.

The fourteenth question is “What role does income play in your relationship?” The majority response was none, chosen twenty-five times (36%). The next highest response was *it enables me to share my income*, chosen sixteen times (23%). Other responses were chosen five times or less. They are *money is necessary, enables shared*

<sup>9</sup> Floyd M. Wylie, “Attitudes Toward the Aging and the Aged Among Black Americans: Some Historical Perspectives,” *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2190/AG.2.1.h>

*financial responsibilities, good when managed right, needed to pay bills, a minor role due to lack of income, and enhances it.* The fact that the majority chose “none” may literally mean it plays no role. It may also indicate that the participants put no emphases on the income variances that exist in their relationships. What’s more interesting is that 23% of the participants expressed the importance of sharing their income with others. This commitment or willingness to share included giving to social causes, giving in church, giving within their family, and giving to help meet other’s needs. Whether someone gives out of obligation or altruism, it reflects an element of loving (*phileo*) that shows we know how to love thru giving. It is likely that a greater commitment to shared values will produce a greater commitment to shared wealth. This would be a wonderful result.

The fifteenth question is “What role does love play in your relationship?” The majority responses (42%) were each chosen fifteen times, and they are *everything* and *important*. The choice of *none* was chosen five times, and *fundamental* was chosen four times. The other responses were chosen three times or less. They are *necessary*, *significant, dominant factor, an obligation, trying to love everyone, loving each other, empowering, binds us together, shown through service, and given, but not returned*. The majority of the participants clearly convey their understanding that love is a very important element of their relationships. This was true across all categories. These responses are crucial to the potential advancement of systematic agapism within the Black community. With a strong commitment to systematic agapism, the potential for healing and developing relationships through shared values is brought within our reach.

In summary, the survey shows that the participants greatly value love as that which makes their relationships work, and as profoundly important in their lives. It shows that communication is the most important factor in the success or failure of a relationship. It was expected that the lack of shared values would stand-out as the leading factor for why our relationships are challenged. However, communication is at the heart of the matter. It makes sense that we need good communication in order to give definition to our tensions, interests, expectations, goals, joys and beliefs. Good shared values are built on good communication.

The survey shows that we most often choose to engage in relationships, and that we choose people who we share commonalities with. Through this survey, we see that the local church in particular, and religion in general, play important roles in our life and relationships as sources of guidance and strength, and as the foundations for our beliefs. We also see how race, gender, age and income can highlight what we share in common, but not serve as excuses for highlighting our differences. Because we are able to share things in common, we are encouraged about greater potential for formally sharing values. Because we highly value love, we can be confident that systematic agapism can be adopted individually and collectively.

## **The Implementation**

### *Sermon Series on Right Relationships*

For nearly two years, the congregation was informed numerous times that the purpose for this project is to heal and develop relationships through shared values based on systematic agapism. The themes of shared values and systematic agapism were

introduced in worship services, ministry team meetings, Bible studies, church council meetings, church community programs, and special contextual associates meetings. By preparing the church for its role in implementing this project, they more enthusiastically embraced it and participated in it.

The formal process for implementing the project began with a three-part sermon series entitled “Right Relationships Sermon Series.” The series was presented as a special message for couple, work, ministry and community relationships. All sermons were preached consecutively, over three Sundays, during morning services at Scott United Methodist Church.

The first sermon was preached on September 1, 2019. The title of the sermon is “Proceed with Caution.” The scripture for the sermon is Matthew 10:16, where it reads “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” The theme of this sermon centers around Jesus sending his disciples to the towns and villages of Judea. They were sent to go to the “lost sheep of Israel” to proclaim that the “Kingdom of heaven has come near.”

In the text, Jesus metaphorically identifies the sheep, the wolves, the serpent and the dove as representations of his disciples (as the obedient sheep, wise serpent and innocent dove), and hostile Jews (as the wolves). In preaching the sermon, It was explained that the disciples were being sent out like gentle sheep among vicious wolves (who Jesus loves too), where they were challenged to wisely find those who were “worthy” to receive them as innocent messengers. They were to be gentle sheep with the wisdom of the serpent, and the innocence of the dove.

In this sermon, a comparison was shown between the disciples being sent out, in the text, to share a message, and those who must go into the Black community today to share a message. Just as the disciples were instructed to go into hostile territories (among wolves) of their own people (other Jews), we must go out (into our own communities) among our own people (who may be hostile toward us) to share and show love. The main point is to “proceed with caution” in these hostile times while going to proclaim the good news.

The second sermon was preached September 8, 2019. The title of the sermon is “Love in the Last Days.” The scripture for the sermon is Matthew 24:1-14, and special emphasis was placed on verses 12 and 13 where we see “And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

In this sermon, the love (*agape*) that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 is offered as a standard in contrast to the presence of lawlessness, spoken of in Matthew 24:12. The main point is that in these “last” and lawless days, the Christian is not only called to love, but to love more. In fact, Jesus said that we would be known by our love.<sup>10</sup>

The third, and final, sermon in the series was preached on September 15, 2019. The title of the sermon is “Don’t be Distracted.” The scripture for this sermon is Philippians 2:1-15, and special emphasis was placed on verses 2-4 where we see “...make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests,

<sup>10</sup> See Matthew 13:35

but to the interests of others.” In this sermon, we focused on Paul’s instructions to the Church at Philippi to have the same love, regard the interests of others above self-interest, and having the mind of Christ, regardless of the distractions that may arise. In spite of what challenges, oppositions, complications, or personal interests arise, we must see them as what may distract us from our opportunities to love. The main point is to decide to love like God decided to love us, especially when distractions arise.

The sermon series was a way to further explain and emphasize the importance of shared values and agape-love. The theme of shared values is expressed in the first sermon by how the disciples shared the instructions of Jesus in common; it was expressed in the second sermon by calling on the congregation to share the values of love found in 1 Corinthians 13; and in the third sermon it was expressed by the emphases placed on being of the same mind, and having the mind of Christ. The theme of agape-love is a common thread in all three sermons by how it is the motivation for reaching, serving, enduring and sacrificing in all three sermons.

These sermons provided great follow up on themes that were shared over the two years before implementation, and good foundation for the other actions subsequently taken to implement the project.

### *The Conference on Love and Values*

The Conference on Love and Values was held at Scott United Methodist Church on October 19, 2019. The Conference was described as a time when we would explore the re-establishment of a system of shared values for the Black community. This event was free and open to anyone interested in helping to develop a system of shared values

that will enable the Black community to develop and heal relationships.

Initially, we planned to do individual interviews with survey participants in order to further explore their responses to survey questions. Instead, we decided to use the Conference as an opportunity to do accomplish this task.

The event was conducted according to the following agenda:

10 a.m. to 10:45 a.m.	PANEL on Shared Values
10:45 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.	MESSAGE by Anyike “The Love of Many”
12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.	WORKING LUNCH on Learning to Love
1:10 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.	OPEN FORUM on Shared Values and Love
2:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.	CLOSING—Where We Go from Here

The Conference began with a panel discussion. The panel participants were Dr. Regina Turner (a professional associate for this project, and professor at Indiana University/Purdue University Indianapolis), Dr. Joseph Smedley (a professional associate for this project and Psychologist), and Rev. Gerald Trotter (a mentor, retired pastor, and President of the Attucks Historical Society).

The panelist each shared their reflections on values shared in the Black community in the past and present. Common themes that arose were how the church played a pivotal role in the community, how people in the community “looked out” for one another, the value placed on Black history, and the unity, resourcefulness and industriousness of the Black community.

The panel discussion was followed by a message entitled “The Love of Many,” which I presented. This message provided an opportunity to explore the meaning of

agape-love, and to fully explain the concept of systematic agapism. We also discussed responses to survey questions in order to gain greater clarity into what the results mean. This presentation was followed by a relaxed question and answer session (while we ate lunch) about systematic agapism and the survey.

The final session was an open discussion about the bringing together of shared values and love. The discussion centered around how love can and should serve as the foundation of our establishing and honoring shared values.

The event concluded with an invitation for the participants to participate in three community forums where we would develop language for practical shared values for the Black community.

In addition to the panelist (Dr. Turner, Dr. Smedley and Rev. Trotter), the Conference was attended by persons who filled out the survey for the project. They are Carcelia Amial, Brie Anderson, TaMara Breeding-Goode, Virrither Cooper, Joshua Jordan, and Morgan Woodford.

Participants also shared what they would “take-away” from the Conference. These are some of their comments:

“Love is contagious.”

“Consciously loving black folks is to be on the same page regarding what we’re up against, and there is important work to do.”

“As a community, we must design our personal standards for love, how to give and receive love, and why we must support our community in the process. We must do this to leave the best legacy for future generations.”

“It has been a wonderful experience. I didn’t plan on staying long, but the

discussion and sharing was too rich and too important to leave. Some very powerful insights have been shared and discussed.”

“I was forced to ask myself ‘What values am I displaying, and what is my relationship with love?’”

“I learned the historical implications of the concept and practice of agape love, and the potential impact of systematic agapism.”

“To develop and heal by applying agape love in all aspects of my humanity.”

## *Come Unity Gatherings*

Following the Conference, we presented three Forums on Love and Values. The forums were held on Sunday afternoons on November 3, 10 and 17, 2019. The forums were hosted by the context associates for the project, who host regular forums called the “Come Unity Gathering.” The Forums described as “where we will develop a practical Statement of Shared Values (SOSV) that will transcend economic, political, theological, gender, generational, and geographic boundaries within the Black community. The Statement of Shared Values will be based on Systematic Agapism (love).” This event was open to anyone interested in helping to develop the SOSV that will enable the Black community to develop and heal relationships.

The agenda for the Forums were conducted as follows:

## Forum Agenda for November 3rd:

### 3 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. Introduction to the Task

## 3:15 p.m. to 3:20 p.m.      Presentation of the Foundational Terms

3:20 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.	Coming to Agreement on the Terms
4:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.	Beginning to Form the Statement of Shared Values

Forum Agenda for November 10<sup>th</sup> and November 17<sup>th</sup>:

3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.	Forming and Completing the Statement of Shared Values
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The work of the Forums began on November 3<sup>rd</sup> with a statement of the project goal to develop a Statement of Shared Values, a report on what was discussed at the Conference on Love and Values, and the presentation of the agenda for the Forums.

Since this effort and the subsequent work seeks to be based on systematic agapism, we took time to discuss foundational terms found in 1 Corinthians 3. The following is wording presented at the Forum to focus our conversation:

#### The Love Ethics and Foundational Terms

My love is patient.

My love is kind.

My love is not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude.

My love does not insist that I win the argument.

My love is not irritable or resentful.

My love does not rejoice in what's wrong.

My love rejoices in what's right and true.

My love bears what the one I love needs me to bear.

My love believes in the sincerity of the one I love.

My love hopes for the very best for the one I love.

My love endures the less lovable attributes of the one I love.

My love is forever.

Based on 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Participants were asked if these love commitments were practical, and what changes can be made to make it practical and appropriate for use as the foundation for developing shared values?

This meaningful discussion included coming to agreement on the terms used. The final form of the foundational terms was changed to the following:

The Love Ethic Foundational Terms to Strive to Live By

My love is patient.

My love is kind.

My love is not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude.

My love does not insist that I win the argument.

My love is not irritable or resentful.

My love does not rejoice in what's wrong.

My love rejoices in what's right and true.

My love bears what the one I love needs me to bear.

My love believes in the sincerity of the one I love.

My love hopes for the very best for the one I love.

My love endures the less lovable attributes of the one I love.

My love is forever.

Based on 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

The revisions to the statement were few, but important. The first revision was changing “My loving...” to “My love...” This was done because “loving” sounded more intimate or erotic (i.e., *eros*), and was changed to “love” because it sounds more in line with agapism. The second revision was changing “...less than lovable attributes...” to

“...less lovable attributes....” The original phrasing could be interpreted to mean one loves any “less than lovable” attributes, which can range from minor annoying personality traits to possible immoral acts. The revised statement narrows the meaning to traits that might be just beyond the lower end of what may be considered lovable. This may include snoring, smelly feet, unusual eating habits, speaking too loud or soft, being too meticulous, procrastinating, and many other traits. The final revision was changing the heading from “The Love Ethic Foundational Terms” to “The Love Ethic Foundational Terms to Strive to Live By.” This change reflects an understanding that these love ethics cannot be lived-out perfectly, and must be viewed as something to seriously strive to live-out. We acknowledged that some people have to be given time to learn to love like this.

We then moved on to developing the Statement of Shared Values. This was done by allowing participants to share their own opinions of what it should include. A provisional statement was given to help the participants focus their suggestions. The provisional statement (which remains as a part of the final Statement of Shared Values) is “In our coming together, we will unselfishly share these values as a means to make our cooperative relationship the most effective and successful it can be in ways that will benefit us individually, and the Black community as a whole.”

The work on developing the Statement of Shared Values was completed on November 17, 2019, at the final Forum. The following is what we developed:

1. We will value and respect each other’s essence and existence
2. We will listen to each other
3. We will strive to be unbiased in our conversations
4. We will be honest and truthful with one another
5. We will honor the elder and honor the potential of the younger of us

6. We will protect one another's privacy and integrity
7. We will work to overcome what divides us
8. We will seek to work in unity and harmony
9. We will work towards the highest outcomes for each other
10. We will encourage each other to be our best selves

Additionally, we decided it was important to define what we mean when we refer to the Black community. We defined it as “A people of African descent, and those who love them, who are bound together by a common history, oppression and aspirations, whose truncated potential is yet to be fully realized.”

Forum participants included Carcelia Amial, Brie Anderson, TaMara Breeding-Goode, Jaqueline Carroll, Virrither Cooper, Kevin Getter, Derrick Jackson, Sr., Portia Jackson, Joshua Jordan, Ahmad Perry, Joseph Smedley, Mary Southern, Regina Turner and Morgan Woodford.

### **Summary of Learning**

There were times when it seemed that this effort was too lofty or counter-cultural to be realized. However, through the Conference and Forums on Love and Values we learned that this effort is realistic. How practical it is may depend on the challenges to the effort that exist in the different settings where efforts are made to heal and develop relationships through shared values based on systematic agapism. Through the surveys and Forums we learned to look at ourselves, and the ways we have failed to maintain our relationships. We live in a time when relationships are largely influenced by selfish interest. We learned that the opposite of love is not hate, it's selfishness. This project has

allowed us to introduce practices and a way of thinking that can establish new trends within the Black community that encourage togetherness as an important quality.

Through the surveys and Forums we learned that we deeply value good communication as a means to healthy relationships, and bad communication as a threat to it. Accordingly, we must value each other, and listen to each other.

Through the sermons and surveys we learned that the local church in particular, and religion in general, serve as positive forces in our lives and communities. Because of its role, the local church is in the best position to serve as a conduit for institutionalizing the effort to promote systematic agapism as a foundation, and the System of Shared Values as an important resource.

Through the Conference and Forums we learned that there is more that unites us (i.e., that we share in common) than that which divides us. Whether it's gender, age, income, geography or religion, we can either use them as reasons for our unity, or appreciate them as expressions of our rich diversity.

Through it all we learned that systematic agapism is a unique way for us to love ourselves, and overcome the common ways we have been injured and mistreated due to racism. We hope that it will be the firm foundation we need to renew our commitments to unity and productivity as the Black community.

Through the surveys we learned that most (53%) of the participants agreed that communication and love were most important in maintaining a good relationship, and 47% said bad communication are its greatest threat.

The survey showed that 63% of the participants are Christian or believe in God. Because the Black Church maintains a ubiquitous presence in the Black community, and

because love is its primary commandment, the infrastructure is already in place for healing and developing relationships through shared values, based on systematic agapism. The next challenge is to formally establish local churches as Love Centers that will encourage systematic agapism and promote the System of Shared Values.

The survey revealed that most of the participants (77%) are pleased with the relationships they are in, and that they believe that 70% of those who they are in relationship with, see the relationship as a lifelong commitment. Despite the high divorce rates, our other forms of relationships (i.e., family, business, social, religious, etc) are fairly stable. This provides a good foundation for re-establishing shared values.

Through this project we were able to do what we hoped to. We accomplished the goal of developing a System of Shared Values, and began the effort to lay the foundation (systematic agapism) for it. Therefore, the fundamental elements for healing and developing relationships through shared values based on systematic agapism have been realized.

## **Conclusion**

The key terms that have emerged from this project are shared values, healing and developing relationships, Black community, communication, Black Church, love center, love, System of Shared Values, and systematic agapism.

Considering what has been learned through fifty-seven years of life and over twenty-five years of ministry, I have found that love is the answer. Home, church, marriage, ministry, community, friendship and family are other words for love, if they are done right. However, for some people, these places fail to love, In these places,

understanding, care and acceptance would be found, if they are based on love. This project is part of an effort to enable love, especially in loveless times.

When Paul provided instructions for the Church at Corinth, he was trying to enable love. The Corinthian Church had so many gifted, articulate, spiritual, and intelligent people, yet they lacked love.

In the Early Church, their efforts to bring about shared beliefs and values regarding the scriptures, theology and polity, was an effort to enable the love of God. Undoubtedly, some church leaders had selfish intent, but the majority of those who influenced it, did so out of love for God and the people of God.

The belief that love is essential and foundational to Christianity is supported by the words of Jesus, and the teachings of theologians like Augustine of Hippo, Paul Tillich, Martin Luther King, and many others. By reminding us that love is the greatest good, they sought to enable love in their own ways and times.

From the 1960s to the present day, the Black community in America has faced numerous challenges. Over the years, its identity and integrity have been challenged. Its love has been strained, but yet it persists. As was stated earlier, “love has not failed, because love is not finished.” At this very moment, love is needed to be enabled in new ways through the Black Church. There is no other institution that is in the best position to heal and empower the Black community. There is no better resource to do it than love.

The Black church, its leaders, and its members can enable love in new ways. They can lead efforts to impact the schools, meet social needs, increase economic stability, facilitate safe streets, and serve as love centers in their own communities.

The project's intent to provide a method to heal and develop relationships through shared values based on systematic agapism has succeeded. Thanks to the collective efforts and support of the project's mentors, focus group, survey participants, community forum participants, professional associates, and members of Scott United Methodist Church, we have succeeded in providing the plans and language that can be used by a church, home, business, community or individual to commit to the System of Shared Values.

It is hoped that this effort will lead to a movement to enable love in Black communities, from the Martindale-Brightwood Community in Indianapolis and beyond.

**APPENDIX A**

**FLIER FOR THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS SERMON SERIES**

# Right Relationships Sermon Series

*For Couple, Family, Work,  
Ministry, and Community  
Relationships  
by Rev. James C. Anyike*

Sept. 1st -15th at 11 a.m.

  Sermon Topics:

1st - *“Proceed With Caution”*

8th - *“Love in the Last Days”*

15th - *“Don’t Be Distracted”*

**APPENDIX B**  
**FLIER FOR THE CONFERENCE ON LOVE AND VALUES**

@AGAPISTSUNITE  
OCTOBER 19, 2019  
10 am to 3 pm  
at SCOTT UM Church



*"The failure to love yourself betrays self. The failure to love others betrays God." James C. Anyike*

*The Conference on Love and Values is where we will re-establish a system of shared values for the Black community.*

# CONFERENCE on LOVE and VALUES

**Developing and Healing Relationships Through  
Shared Values Based on Systematic Agapism**

**LED BY REV. JAMES C. ANYIKE**

Doctor of Ministry Student at United Theological Seminary

2153 Dr. Andrew J. Brown Ave.

Indianapolis, IN

RSVP by text to 317.529.3768

or by email at [anyike@aim.com](mailto:anyike@aim.com)

**Conference Agenda:**

10 a.m. to 10:45 a.m.

**PANEL on Shared Values**

10:45 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.

**MESSAGE by Anyike "The Love of Many"**

12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

**WORKING LUNCH on Learning to Love**

1:10 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

**OPEN FORUM on Shared Values and Love**

2:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

**CLOSING—Where We Go From Here**

*This event is free and open to anyone interested in helping to develop a system of shared values that will enable the Black community to develop and heal relationships. This conference is also presented in fulfillment of James Anyike's doctoral project.*

**APPENDIX C**  
**FLIER FOR THE FORUMS ON LOVE AND VALUES**

**@AGAPISTSUNITE**  
NOVEMBER 3rd & 10th, 2019  
3 pm to 4:30 pm  
at SCOTT UM Church



*"The failure to love yourself betrays self.  
The failure to love others betrays God."  
James C. Anyike*

*The Forums on Love and Values are Come Unity Gatherings where we will develop a practical Statement of Shared Values (SOSV) that will transcend economic, political, theological, gender, generational, and geographic boundaries within the Black community. The SOSV will be based on Systematic Agapism (love).*

# FORUMS on LOVE and VALUES

**Developing and Healing Relationships Through  
Shared Values Based on Systematic Agapism**

**LED BY REV. JAMES C. ANYIKE**

Doctor of Ministry Candidate at United Theological Seminary

2153 Dr. Andrew J. Brown Ave.  
Indianapolis, IN  
RSVP by text to 317.529.3768  
or by email at [anyike@aim.com](mailto:anyike@aim.com)

**Forum Agenda for Nov. 3rd:**

3 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.  
*Introduction to the Task*  
3:15 p.m. to 3:20 p.m.  
*Presentation of the Foundational Terms*  
3:20 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
*Coming to Agreement on the Terms*  
4:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
*Beginning to Form the SOSV*

**Forum Agenda for Nov. 10th:**

3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
*Forming and Completing the SOSV*

*This event is open to anyone interested in helping to develop the SOSV that will enable the Black community to develop and heal relationships. The forums are presented in fulfilment of James Anyike's doctoral project.*

**APPENDIX D**  
**STATEMENT OF SHARED VALUES**

### The LOVE ETHIC to Strive to Live By

It is hoped that as you commit to this Statement of Shared Values, you would do it based on **systematic agapism** (love). Systematic agapism is a specific form of agape love that takes into consideration the unique history, needs and aspirations of black people, who are to be recipients of this love. In this case, the system has been developed to serve as the foundation for shared values for the Black community with intent to facilitate the development, maintenance and success of relationships within healthy families, churches and communities.

My love is patient. My love is kind. My love is not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude.

My love does not insist that I win the argument. My love is not irritable or resentful.

My love does not rejoice in what's wrong. My love rejoices in what's right and true.

My love bears what the one I love needs me to bear. My love believes in the sincerity of the one I love.

My love hopes for the very best for the one I love.

My love endures the less lovable attributes of the one I love.

My love is forever.

*Based on 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

## Statement of Shared Values

*By signing this document, we agree to unselfishly share these values as a means to make our cooperative relationship the most effective and successful it can be in ways that will benefit us individually, and the Black community as a whole. We define the Black community as a people of African descent, and those who love them, who are bound together by a common history, oppression and aspirations, whose truncated potential is yet to be fully realized.*

1. We will value and respect each other's essence and existence
2. We will listen to each other
3. We will strive to be unbiased in our conversations
4. We will be honest and truthful with one another
5. We will honor the elder and honor the potential of the younger of us
6. We will protect one another's privacy and integrity
7. We will work to overcome what divides us
8. We will seek to work in unity and harmony
9. We will work towards the highest outcomes for each other
10. We will encourage each other to be our best selves

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Signer

Date

Signer

Date

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